

Soviet Russian Literature

*Selected
Reading*



PROGRESS PUBLISHERS Moscow

This anthology of Soviet Russian literature is being published in English along with editions of a similar kind. Progress Publishers also intend to bring out anthologies covering Russian classical literature, the literature of the peoples of the URSS, and literature for children. Separate editions include CLASSIC SOVIET PLAYS, NINE MODERN SOVIET PLAYS, the two-volume ANTHOLOGY OF SOVIET SHORT STORIES and a collection of SOVIET RUSSIAN POETRY.

The present anthology will introduce a wide English-speaking public to Soviet literature.

It represents sixty poets and prose writers who have contributed to the development of Soviet Russian literature over the last fifty years.

The material is divided into two main periods: 1917-1941, and 1941-1977, each being supplied with an introduction. Furthermore, there is a foreword in which the main characteristics of the literature of Socialist Realism are outlined.

The book also contains biographical notes on the authors.

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Soviet Russian Literature



Selected Reading

Soviet Russian Literature

1917-1977

*Poetry
and
Prose*

Selected Reading

Progress Publishers • Moscow

Compiled by *Yuri Andreyev*
Introductory articles and biographical
notes also by *Yuri Andreyev*
Translated from the Russian
Designed by *Vladimir Vagin*

РУССКАЯ СОВЕТСКАЯ
ЛИТЕРАТУРА 1917-1977
(Хрестоматия)

Составитель, автор статей, биографических справок
об авторах ЮРИЙ АНДРЕЕВ

На английском языке

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Intended for the English-speaking public, *Soviet Russian Literature, 1917-1977* is one of several similar editions. In the last few years, Progress Publishers have brought out in English a two-volume anthology of Soviet short stories by about sixty authors, a collection, *Nine Modern Soviet Plays*. Another anthology, *Classic Soviet Plays*, is now in preparation. Anthologies of Soviet verse are also published at intervals. The reading public abroad gave a good reception to *Fifty Soviet Poets*, which has already run to two editions and which mainly featured contemporary writers. Currently in preparation is a bumper edition, *Three Centuries of Russian Poetry*. Progress Publishers also make a point of introducing to the foreign reader the writers of Lithuania, Estonia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Georgia, Armenia, Uzbekistan and Kirghizia. The present anthology continues this tradition with passages representing Soviet literature from the first days of its emergence up to the present day and features sixty Russian prose writers and poets, from Gorky to Shukshin and from Mayakovsky to Voznesensky, who have contributed to the development of Soviet literature over the last half century.

The anthology is divided into two parts, each with an introduction.

Part One covers mainly the first quarter of a century in the history of Soviet literature, from 1917 to the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945.

Part Two (1941-1977) draws on the literature of the four war years, reflecting contemporary life and illustrating the literary development of the 60s and 70s.

There are some deviations from this principle in the poetry selections so the reader can gain a more comprehensive picture of the poet and his work from the verse of various periods, sometimes decades apart.

In addition to the surveys at the beginning of each part, there is an introduction dealing with the salient features of Soviet literature. Brief biographical notes on the authors complete the picture of literary life in the Soviet Union.

This book is not a textbook for study, although it includes the main works on the curriculum of Soviet higher educational establishment specialising in the humanities; it is meant rather to be read for its own sake and to cater for the wide public interest in Soviet literature.

The anthology was compiled and the articles and biographical notes were written by Yuri Andreyev, Doctor of Philology and Senior Scientific Worker at the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of Russian Literature, Pushkin House, Leningrad.

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THE HISTORY AND MAIN FEATURE OF SOVIET LITERATURE

You have before you an anthology of Soviet Russian literature illustrating six decades of its development.

I have frequently had the occasion to meet, both officially and unofficially, students and teachers, philologists and publishers, tourists, or simply members of the reading public from Britain, the USA and Canada, and I have often been able to familiarise myself with literary critical works published over there and devoted to Soviet Russian literature. It would be a serious exaggeration on my part to claim that Soviet literature is well known in these countries. Many readers are not familiar with it at all. There are even well educated people who have read nothing later than Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, but since those times, decades of events on a truly Biblical scale have elapsed—nearly a whole century of human history. The world, which is not as big as it was, and the human soul, which has proved to be infinitely large, have been rocked by titanic convulsions, and these have unfailingly been reflected with excitement, passion and deep thought by Soviet writers.

We will not now analyse why the knowledge of Soviet Russian literature in the English-speaking countries is so poor (we, at least, never hid our wealth), but we shall try in some measure to fill this gap.

Contemporary world culture is like communicating vessels; the spiritual wealth worked out by one people on one continent very quickly becomes the property of other peoples and other continents. Incidentally, the simile is inadequate:

the characteristic of these communicating vessels, as distinct from those with which the physicists are concerned, is that with a rise of level in one of them, the level in the other vessels does not fall; on the contrary, it attempts to rise to the same higher mark. The peoples move forward, enriching one another.

What can this book give the reader? What does it contain?

But before answering what is in it, I must briefly mention what is absent.

The abundance of suitable material is so great that the compiler's difficulties in selecting the texts might perhaps be compared to those of a cosmonaut who, owing to the restricted size of his cabin, is allowed to carry into space only the minimum number of the favourite objects that he takes with him everywhere on the Earth.

Soviet literature is multinational; it is published in 76 languages of the Soviet peoples and is a remarkable constellation of original literatures, many of which can now claim writers of truly world-wide importance. This anthology will contain representative works of Soviet Russian literature only, and I have no hesitation in calling it our great Soviet Russian literature. This anthology, we hope, will be followed by similar editions of texts selected from the literatures of the other Soviet peoples.

Soviet Russian literature is well represented here, but the authors in the anthology are only a fraction of those who appeared in print after the October Revolution in 1917. The only consolation is that the variety of personalities, themes, styles and creative approaches here will convey at least in some degree the mood of Russian literature of 1917-1977, just as a small pine branch can suggest the fragrance of the great forest. And I am passionately convinced that familiarity with this anthology will inspire the lively and unsimulated interest of the reader in the human and aesthetic treasures which Soviet literature has accumulated. And now let us consider the contents.

Where to begin?

Perhaps it would be appropriate to begin with a short introduction to the writers who created Soviet Russian literature from its very first steps, with a story of their extremely colourful personalities. I am one of those literary historians who are inclined to see the source of many features

of the work in the life of a writer. For the examples which follow, I shall be drawing on the lives and work of writers, not all of whom are represented in this anthology.

The name of Larissa Reisner came into prominence during the Civil War. She was a woman of rare beauty and education, the daughter of a professor. Before the revolution, she edited with her father a magazine for the intelligentsia with a penchant for aestheticism. During the revolution, as a fearless public speaker and commissar of the Volga Flotilla, Larissa Reisner inspired the sailors with her passionate speeches calling for struggle with the Whites. She took part in many battles and campaigns. Eventually captured by the enemy, she showed extraordinary presence of mind and managed to escape. Several years passed, the Civil War ended, and Larissa Reisner, the heroic fighter for social justice, became a writer. In a book of essays, *The Front*, she told all about the people and the battle of the Volga Flotilla.

Fighting with the same flotilla was Vsevolod Vishnevsky, a valiant sailor from the Baltic Fleet. He saw action on several fronts before the Civil War ended, and a few more years passed before he took up literature and wrote the play that made him famous, *An Optimistic Tragedy*. Larissa Reisner, the real-life prototype, was before the writer's eyes as he delineated the woman commissar on board ship—true, in the Black Sea Fleet.

Alexander Malyshkin, author of a romantic epic, *The Fall of Dair*, led the storming of Perekop—the last bulwark of the whiteguards on the Black Sea. Dmitry Furmanov was commissar of Chapayev's division (an excerpt from his novel, *Chapayev*, is printed here). He took part in many battles and, notably, had the good luck to fight with the legendary Kovtyukh whom Alexander Serafimovich, under the name of Kozhukh, featured in his *The Iron Flood*. It is only right that the bas-relief on the grave of Furmanov, whose death was so untimely, depicts a sabre and a book, for he devotedly served the cause of the revolution wherever fate took him.

Nikolai Ostrovsky took up writing in order to stay in the fighting line when serious injuries and contusions finally put an end to his service as a cavalryman. He wrote a book of great moral power, *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

Alexander Fadeyev, the author of *The Rout*, was organiser of partisan detachments in the Far East, and Isaac Babel, Fyodor Gladkov, Konstantin Fedin, Leonid Leonov, Eduard Bagritsky and many other writers were army newspapermen. Mikhail Sholokhov, who was to become a writer of world renown and a Lenin Prize winner, was taken prisoner in battle by Makhno's bandits and only escaped execution by a miracle. The remarkable children's writer, Arkady Gaidar, commanded a fighting regiment during the Civil War when he was only sixteen years old.

Not so much life stories as epics, and it is not hard to understand from where Soviet writers of the early period drew their plots and where they met their heroes.

But only of the early period? They were also active builders of the new life, and in the 20s and 30s, the achievements and exploits of that heroic time, the era of the first Soviet five-year plans, found reflection in works that were as powerful as they were profound. Along with the rest of the Soviet people, the writers were soon to bear the brunt of the blow from the Nazi hordes during the Second World War.

A. Gaidar, whom we mentioned just now, died heroically in action in 1941 during the first month of the war.

About a third of the Soviet writers went to the front during the Second World War, where they courageously fought a ferocious enemy with pen and submachine gun. Over four hundred of them did not return from the battlefield, taking their dreams with them forever.... And yet many soldiers and officers survived the war to become famous authors!

The life stories of writers, which explain and interpret many facts of a strictly literary order, can also account for something more essential that goes well beyond the bounds of creative structure and poetic originality; they can help us to understand the force of the social impact exerted by the work. This force is determined by unity of word and deed. Behind the words of Soviet writers are their own lives; in confirmation of those words many of them shed their own blood.

Of course, every biography is unique, and the experience of life is often hard to collate: for example, *Ordeal* by former count Alexei Tolstoy, who was, as he tells us himself, on the side of the whiteguards during the Civil War, and whose way to the Bolsheviks was literally an ordeal—here we have one

kind of background described, totally different from that of our contemporary, gold-pro prospector and scientific worker Oleg Kuvayev, who had experience of geological work in the Far North and the East and who wrote a remarkable book, *Territory*. But each of the different backgrounds in one way or another explains something vital in Soviet Russian literature: its moral strength, backed by personal experience and a carefully thought-out approach.

There is no need to dwell in detail on the life stories here, since there is a biographical note on each of the writers represented. Let us consider the variety of form and the wealth of creative individuality in the anthology.

There have been few periods in the history of world literature to equal the one when stars of the first magnitude like Alexander Blok, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Sergei Yesenin were in the ascendant, poets as totally unlike one another as they were geniuses.

Some critics consider Boris Pasternak and Velimir Khlebnikov equally great (they made their poetic débuts at almost exactly the same time as Mayakovsky). I have my reservations about this point of view, but if it is accepted, the rhetorical question asked above only comes over the more forcefully, and the answer will be even more convincing: the history of world literature has seldom seen such a dazzling display of poetic genius.

With unprecedented power, each of these poets expressed certain aspects of the human spirit and of that turbulent period of social upheaval: Mayakovsky—the joy of the titanic revolutionary restructuring of society; Blok—the complexity and extreme contradictoriness of this sacred time; Yesenin—the private world of the human being who, unexpectedly for himself, is drawn into the struggles of the age.

I think the reader will agree with me that their work is true of events in more than one country and in more than one historical period of development. With the passage of time, it acts more and more strongly on the most important events of the contemporary epoch because it truly expresses something vital, something most important for the era of great historical changes that began in October 1917.

This anthology features twenty-six poets altogether. Each of them, whatever his gifts, is unique, and to read any one of

them is to discover a continent, or archipelago, or island on the planet named Mankind.

Soviet Russian prose is no less colourful and significant. Take Mikhail Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don*: it may be likened to a vast mountain land cast upon the surface of history by human passions and by anguished, frenzied searchings after the truth for which human reason and human conscience strive. Nearby flows the molten volcanic lava of *The Iron Flood* by Alexander Serafimovich. Mikhail Bulgakov's wild fantasy, *Master and Margarita*, dazzles with all the many facets of the human imagination; then comes Mikhail Prishvin's *Ginseng*, a harmonious blend of the love of nature with profound wisdom. Then come Maxim Gorky's austere prose, Marietta Shaginyan's essays, the impassioned stories of Grigory Baklanov; the work of Fyodor Abramov and Vassili Shukshin, purely contemporary in thought and structure and yet profoundly national in characterisation; the brilliant historical stories of Yuri Tynyanov; the philosophical reflections of Leonid Leonov and Daniil Granin, and the intensely human fantasies of Ivan Yefremov.

Taken at its best, Soviet literature is undoubtedly worthy of special study, and we shall undertake a somewhat more detailed analysis in the articles introducing the two chronologically separate parts of this anthology. I would now like to dwell on a few very general points from the methodological point of view. When we talk about Soviet literature, we consciously or unconsciously assume that it has certain qualities which distinguish it from other literatures, and each Soviet writer of importance is strictly individual and not like any of the others.

In what way are Soviet writers distinctive?

In their common historical destiny. The writers of our country, together with its whole people, in a very short period of time—a mere 60 years, which is only a moment in historical terms!—experienced as many tragic events, shouldered as many burdens and gained as many victories of world historical significance as would have sufficed for a thousand years in the history of certain other countries.

Let us recall the October Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War that followed. October was the most bloodless of all the revolutions in history. The young revolution, since it was naive and pure in heart, released its most active enemies,

generals and officers, on their word of honour. The first decree of the Soviet government was the Decree on Peace and an appeal to the governments of all the belligerent powers to stop the war immediately and sign a peace. It suited history, however, to subject the new-born state to a hail of blows, each more dangerous and more cunning than the last. The generals, who had given their word of honour not to struggle with the people's power, organised bloody revolts against it everywhere and moved up well-trained armies from the south, west and east against Moscow and Petrograd. The Socialist-Revolutionaries (SR.s) tried to pull off a government coup and organised, as a provocation, the murder of the German ambassador, after which the German hordes invaded Russian territory. The SR.s arrested some members of the people's government and planned to assassinate Lenin. Their emissaries organised bloody risings against Soviet power on the Volga. The governments of the countries to which Lenin appealed for immediate cessation of the world war replied in a very strange way: they invaded Russia. Fourteen states from all sides, like a pack of starving wolves, attacked a country bleeding with Civil War and tried to tear it to pieces, cold-bloodedly butchering the peaceful population, plundering the country's wealth and trying to strangle the new-born state. With Moscow at its centre, a small ring, like a red, urgently beating heart, still remained free on the map of Russia—all the rest was seized by the occupying forces and White mutineers. This lasted for four years. In spite of it all, the people triumphed. The occupying troops of all kinds were hurled back into the sea or fled ignominiously, the White armies either dispersed or surrendered. An enormous national tragedy ended in an outstanding victory for justice, and the consequences of this victory resounded like a peal of thunder all over the world and played a decisive part in the further development of world history.

The writers were not only eyewitnesses of these events, they were active participants. I have briefly recalled the lives of several, and even this cursory account shows that they were moved by the same force as the whole people who accomplished that feat. Only think about the appallingly difficult circumstances under which the Soviet people gained their victory! This could only have happened because they were struggling for what mattered most to them, because they

were fighting to achieve great goals. And the forces which inspired the people also guided their writers. The reader will be made aware of these moral and social forces which sustained the Soviet writers who went through the mill of the Civil War; the reader will see for himself the dramatic collisions which erupted without cease in the embattled country, and he will understand precisely what it was that united so many different people who took up the pen, such as, for example, former tsarist officer Boris Lavrenyov, who joined the revolutionary people and went with them all the way, or Nikolai Ostrovsky, the son of a poor washerwoman.

It is no secret that many famous and very gifted Russian writers fled at that time from their country when it was in the throes of revolution. They did not stay silent when abroad and they were liberally published. However, what has become of their writings? Almost the whole of émigré literature, with rare exceptions, is now on the rubbish-dump of history. At the same time, what came from the pens of writers in the new-born republic is being accepted all over the world as new in the artistic development of mankind as a whole, although the overwhelming majority of these writers were only starting out on their literary careers and did not have the experience or the literary schooling which had been undergone by the Russian émigré writers. The solution to this seeming paradox lies in understanding that the thoughts and feelings of the ones who joined their people were just and true, as time's impartial judgement has shown. The history of civilisation has frequently and cogently demonstrated that man does not need false ideals, emotions and views for his development; he rejects them without a qualm.

But now let us consider the further course of events. History granted less than two decades to the Soviet people for the restoration of the disrupted economy and for the peaceful reconstruction of life. These were very difficult years, full of hardship and, at the same time, inspired with unbelievable enthusiasm. Once again, the writers were with the people on the construction sites and in the villages. Industrialisation, which was being carried out in a historically unprecedented short space of time, and the shifting of a disrupted and backward country on to the main line of advanced industrial technology, were the personal concern of the writers. The collectivisation of agriculture, the liquidation of illiteracy, the

creation of a new science—these too were their personal concern. The writers were personally involved in the turbulent era of the first pre-war five-year plans for the transformation of the Soviet Union. This was neither a simple nor an easy process—people were living for lofty ideals, but they were having hard times. We had to sell our priceless art treasures to other countries: we were forced to do this in order to import the machinery we so urgently needed in exchange. Our men and women were prematurely aged by intensive and unremitting toil; but what would it have been like for us, and the rest of the world too, if the Soviet Union had not been able to prepare for the incursion of the brown plague?

Nearer and nearer it came, and finally it arrived, that terrible day of 22 June 1941, when nazi Germany and its satellites invaded the Soviet Union. Almost the whole of Europe was under the heel of the nazi jackboot by this time; the German army was using not only its own industry, but that of many other countries. The fascists struck suddenly, like bandits. The war lasted for nearly four years and carried away over twenty million human lives; it cost us one thousand two hundred cities totally destroyed and innumerable villages burned to ashes. Victory or death—that was our slogan, and we won.

The reader is bound to notice how many works by widely different writers are about the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945.

The undiminishing interest of Soviet writers in the war is easily accounted for: this theme is relevant because, like no other, it makes it possible to lay bare the human soul, revealing, in the final analysis, the essence of the very people; it is relevant because many writers who went through the war consider themselves eternally in debt to those who fell heroically in action, sacrificing themselves so that others could live; and it is relevant because this was the feat of a whole embattled people not only at the front, but in the rear; and because, enduring war, people begin to value peace above all else.

When the fighting was over, many cities and villages had to be raised out of the ruins at a time when the most active, capable, younger section of the population had been left forever on the battlefields. I do not know whether the foreign

reader is aware how exhausting was the nuclear race imposed on us immediately after the war was over. Soviet writers were also with the people in those days, as you will see from the works presented here.

You will also, I hope, understand the reason for that proud, calm outlook which is so typical of our authors: it is a view of life held by those who, together with their people, were able to survive the dreadful sufferings that fell to their lot and to accomplish a feat of world historical significance. Thanks to October and the first five-year plans, thanks to the victory that smashed Hitler's war machine, and thanks to the post-war decades, when the efforts of Soviet people put a stop to the nuclear blackmail which began with the ill-fated explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we look at the world as people who have done everything possible, and impossible, so that humanity should peacefully proceed along the way of good and of social progress.

After that short but necessary historical and sociological introduction, I think it may be possible to define the quality of Soviet literature that is inherent in it to a greater degree than in the other literatures of the world. It is a quality hard to formulate with mathematical exactitude because it has many shades and manifestations, but if we try to define it nevertheless, then it will go roughly as follows: an active attitude on the part of the writer to the world around him.

According to Marx's brilliant and famous dictum that philosophers have only explained the world so far, but that the task is to remake it, we can reasonably describe the activity of Soviet writers as being in the spirit not only of this Marxist thesis, but of the Marxist-Leninist world outlook in general. However, it would be a serious mistake and an oversimplification of the solution to a complex task if we were to derive this radical quality of our literature direct from a political teaching. All the experience of social-historical reality, in which the life of literature and art is immersed, has irrefutably demonstrated the rightness of, and the necessity for, the active and conscious restructuring of the world.

Only the energy and initiative of the masses, guided by the Party of Lenin, inspired Russia to get out of the terrible and bloody First World War, to overthrow the government that craved for the continuation of that war, and to announce the birth of a new state. As it turned out, the writers, whose

thoughts and feelings rang out in unison with the people's practice and who had adopted a position of active interference in the affairs of society, were the very ones who advocated the standpoint of true democracy, for they were acting in the interests of the overwhelming majority.

Historical truth was on the side of the Soviet writers when they fought with the people for the expulsion of foreign occupying troops from 1918 to 1922 and struggled actively against the restoration of those forces which wanted to put the clock back in Russia.

Reality itself showed the necessity for the active structuring of the whole rhythm of life before the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, and reality itself has proved that only thanks to the full straining of all moral and physical powers on the part of each person did victory become possible over the forces of world evil as embodied in German fascism.

In the same way, the whole of post-war reality convinced us, and still does, that only an active and purposeful struggle for peace is capable of preserving and strengthening that peace; that only an active and purposeful struggle for the curtailment of arms all over the world and for the banning of the atomic bomb can bring relief to mankind; that only vast constructive activity on the part of society as a whole can heal our wounds and substantially improve the living conditions of people who, by all the laws of human justice, have deserved it.

The foreign reader should now understand what causes lie at the root of the love and sympathy of Soviet writers for people who bear an active moral force within them, who strive for a better life, not so much for themselves as for others, for their own people, above all, and who are even ready, for the achievement of their ideals, to sacrifice their lives. Such people are not figments of our writers' imaginations; the very existence and uninterrupted progress of our country, with its difficult and heroic history, should convince any sceptic or disbeliever of this. Conscience, justice, self-sacrifice—these are not all abstract concepts for Soviet writers, but the very rock-bottom foundations of their outlook on the world.

Soviet Russian literature, like everything in this life, is not static; it develops, changes, something is lost, something is gained. But what matters most is still there: a convincingly

active attitude to reality on the part of the writers. They see it as it is, but strive that our long-suffering world should be happy!...

A few words about the layout of this anthology: it is divided into two parts, each of which opens with an introductory chapter written by the compiler and contains fiction—poetry and prose texts. The first part, in the main, consists of material written before the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945; the second part covers work written during and after the war up to the present day.

Have a pleasant journey, reader!...

Part One

~~1917-1941~~

BETWEEN TWO WORLD WARS

And now, reader, you are about to go more deeply into certain specific features of the Soviet Russian literature that was created in the years between the two world wars, that is, from 1917 to 1941. We have already discussed the particular features of our reality which determined the daily life and existence of the Soviet people and their writers. We are now concerned with the literature that grew up during the cataclysmic years of the Civil War and the revolution, that breathed the romantic wind of freedom and was illumined by the sunlight of nation-wide enthusiasm, but on the threshold of the trials lying in store for the Soviet Union.

In 1917, before October, a remarkable Russian writer, Alexander Serafimovich, said prophetically: "...There will finally come a time when they won't go down to the cellar to visit the people: the people themselves will rise up in all their power; they will elevate themselves to the culture that has long been waiting for them and in which they should have taken their places long ago.

"Then we won't read those heart-rending descriptions of the poor little muzhik, the poor little worker or the poor little soldier.

"Talented writers will describe him as an equal, as they now describe their own kind. And the gifts of the people themselves will not be lost on the writers.

"And this time is already drawing near..."

After October, it came: a highly characteristic feature of the new-born Soviet literature was that talented writers in general began to portray the life of the people *from within*, not from without. The peculiarity of Soviet literature was, as

I have already said in the introductory article, that it began to be created by those people who were struggling for the consolidation of Soviet power. Their ideas on life and their work were the result of their own experiences in that struggle. And that is why they are so genuinely of the people and could speak with such unsurpassed sincerity.

There now began an unprecedented and incredible process of mass entry into literature by writers from among all levels of the working population. Writers flocked to literature in their hundreds—democrats in origin, convictions, world outlook and philosophy of life, spokesmen expressing the political and aesthetic views of the workers and peasants. “An irresistible flood of creative energy is now streaming into literature from the depths of the people!” wrote the well-known bibliographer V. Vladislavlev in 1927. “... According to our rough estimate, about a thousand people during the last ten years have had their work published in separate editions. It is doubtful whether as many as a hundred could be found among them who had been doing this before the revolution.”

Of interest in this context are the recollections of author Dmitry Furmanov about his acquaintance with Leonid Leonov, a beginner at the time and now a famous writer and Lenin Prize winner (there is an excerpt from his novel, *The Russian Forest*, in this anthology). In 1925, Furmanov was working in one of the Moscow publishing houses. N. Nakoryakov, an editor at the publishing house, said to him once:

“‘Leonov’s coming in today; we’re going to have a talk.... We might accept a book of his. He’s going to be a big writer....’

“I looked forward to this meeting with great excitement without knowing why. But that’s the way it was.

“An hour later, I went into the next room, looked, and saw Vaska Lapot sitting there. Have you ever heard of Vaska Lapot? No? Let me explain. Four years ago all working in the editorial offices of the newspaper *Red Soldier* had been beginners, and among them at one time was Vaska Lapot. Apparently he wrote essays and articles.... A pleasant lad whom we all liked.

“I sat with Nakoryakov, we got on with our work, and I completely forgot that I had seen Vaska in the next room; we

had exchanged greetings casually and had smiled at one another. But Vaska himself suddenly came in. Nakoryakov rose and said to me:

“‘Dmitry Andreyevich, allow me to introduce Leonid Leonov, the writer....’

“I stared at Vaska, but quickly recovered myself, snapped out of it and made no comment, as if there was nothing unusual about it.... I even laughed and gave Vaska a dig in the ribs:

“‘But for God’s sake, we’ve known one another for the last four years!’

“He gave me some books, and I gave him mine—*Mutiny*—and wrote in it: ‘I’ve been seeing you all this time and never realised that it was you.’

“25 August 1925”

During those years, what came first for the future writers was usually their military, newspaper and political work, and so it happened that the writers met after the Civil War, although their paths had crossed even earlier, during that war.

The special quality of the literature born of October was, above all, its system, organically inherent in its creators, of genuinely democratic views, ideas and convictions.

In Boris Lavrenyov’s fine story, “The Forty First”, there is a highly characteristic scene: a former fisherwoman from near Astrakhan, now Red Army soldier Maryutka Basova, is listening on a desert island to Guards Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok: “‘There once lived a rich man in the city of Liverpool. His name was Robinson Crusoe....’ Maryutka interrupts the officer: ‘Wait!... Rich, you say? And why is it that they only talk about rich folks and tsars in all the fairy-tales? It isn’t done to say a word about a poor man.’

“‘I don’t know,’ replied the lieutenant, puzzled. ‘It never entered my mind.’

“‘Maybe the rich folks wrote the stories themselves. I want to write poetry, I haven’t had any schooling. But I’d write wonderfully about a poor man. Never mind. I’ll study a bit, and then I’ll write something.’”

Maryutka Basova wrote verse, and she indeed arrived in literature—not as a poet, but as a tragic and brave woman in a tragic and heroic era. Her ideals, feelings and views, however, were not consigned to oblivion. Soviet writers gave them worthy expression in their work.

The most substantial innovation by Soviet literature during the first stage of its development and a revolutionary step forward in the development of world literature was the revelation of the spiritual and historic life of the man of the people on an artistic level commensurate with the finest classical examples created at earlier stages in the development of Russian and world literature.

Undoubtedly, “simple” people were nothing new to literature. Remember Cervantes’ Sancho Panza, Shakespeare’s Falstaff, Lev Tolstoy’s Platon Karatayev—such vivid people so brilliantly portrayed and so accurately typifying the various human qualities! And yet each seems to have something exotic, slightly freakish and weird about him; each is seen from outside, as it were, and not from inside. Don Quixote, Hamlet and Prince Andrei Bolkonsky are much richer characters than their “simple” literary coevals. They are delineated, so to speak, according to other laws of creative vision.

There have, of course, been other characters from the people in literature: Pugachev in Pushkin’s *The Captain’s Daughter*, the characters in Dostoyevsky’s *The Insulted and Humiliated*, and Chekhov’s *Muzhiks*. None the less, these images (for all the author’s unconcealed sympathy and even love) still come second in psychological treatment to others created by the same writers—Eugene Onegin, for example, Boris Godunov, Raskolnikov or Prince Myshkin.

The truly democratic approach, which had been inevitably maturing in the whole of world literature, to the portrayal of the man from the masses, found the fulfilment of its aesthetic principle above all in the pre-revolutionary writings of Maxim Gorky (his famous novel, *Mother*, written in 1906). Inspired by these principles, Soviet writers accomplished a genuine artistic revolution after October. In M. Sholokhov’s *Quiet Flows the Don* (the first volume was already out in 1927), there was a true revelation in the psychological analysis of the inner world of a man from the masses, a man from the

overwhelming majority, of working people. But does this apply only to *Quiet Flows the Don*? Did not the same tendency show with magnificent vividness and power in works by other writers, whether represented in this anthology or not? Was it not paramount in the work of Dmitry Furmanov, Lydia Seifullina, Alexander Neverov, Alexander Malyshkin, Vsevolod Ivanov, Isaak Babel, Nikolai Ostrovsky and many, many others?

The great democratic spirit in Soviet literature was born in the 20th century, the age of the working people's Great October Revolution, the age of the national liberation movements that ultimately led to the collapse of colonialism all over the world. This democratic spirit expresses the main line of mankind's historical development, its movement towards the future, when the free development of each becomes a condition for the free development of all. This emphasis on close attention to each and not on a chosen few is the essence of the artistic discovery of the age and accounts for the wide interest, here and all over the world, in books written by the masters of Soviet literature. Uneducated Cossack men and women, soldiers, blacksmiths and herdsmen are portrayed with the same consummate skill that was formerly used to depict unusual people who stood out—either by virtue of position, or origin, or education, or intellectual achievement, or extreme refinement of sensibility. The dilemmas facing Aksinya Astakhova in *Quiet Flows the Don* are no simpler than those facing Anna Karenina, and the tragic choice which has to be made by Grigory Melekhov is fully commensurate in significance with the one that caused such anguish to Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

Sholokhov set himself the extremely difficult task of showing the spiritual, beautiful, honest and noble man in his tragic struggle with the people's revolution and its aspirations for the good of mankind as a whole.

Melekhov's tragedy is doubly complex: after all, Grigory is by nature a collectivist (the result of his milieu, way of life and upbringing). But his collectivism is narrow and limited; he is a collectivist within the framework of his Cossack status, or caste, and he is a long way from understanding the nation-wide interests of the revolution. This is also the result of the economic and ideological factors of his life. The problem facing Melekhov is qualitatively more complex

than the one which faced, say, the officer Roshchin in Alexei Tolstoy's *Ordeal*. After all, Grigory has to overcome from the beginning the cruel toils of the narrow Cossack collectivism whose justice, to him, is identified with ideal justice.

The ending to *Quiet Flows the Don*, published in this anthology, does not conform to type: but there is great historic meaning hidden in this originality. There are books in which the adherent of the individualist philosophy is morally and physically destroyed (Maxim Gorky's *The Life of Klim Samgin*). There is the way of moral regeneration recorded in artistic form (Alexei Tolstoy's *Ordeal*), and there is the "optimistic tragedy" of the person who perishes, but attains the truth (*Les Thibault* by R. Martin du Guard). In *Quiet Flows the Don*, however, the powerful current of history, objectively confirming the necessity for a new morality, is projected into the future. This morality does not, however, become the conviction of the principal character. Reality has already smashed to smithereens the Cossack morality, has shown to Grigory Melekhov, implacably and without compassion, all the falsity of living for oneself alone; but, complicated and obscured by many transient factors, it has not yet convinced Melekhov of the rightness of the morality of the people as a whole. And in this disharmony between the advance of history and the man who rejects the new morality we find the most important generalisation in Sholokhov, who strives for the truth, however harsh it may be, and who will not accept illusion of any kind. Having shown, in conformity with the great tide of history, the main line of human ethical development, Sholokhov, again in conformity with history, shows us that this process is accomplished by no means lightly, but sometimes at the cost of real anguish, and that more and more struggle lies ahead.

The reader will at once become aware of the militantly democratic spirit of Soviet writers and he will not part company with this feeling until the end of the book, whatever he may happen to read: verse or prose, whether about the Civil War (as in Furmanov's *Chapayev*) or about the difficulties of post-war reconstruction, as in F. Gladkov's *Cement*, or about the enthusiasm inspired by the great goals which were put before our people during the historically brief

period of time between the two world wars (in the novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, by N. Ostrovsky). The reader will see that Soviet authors, seeking the best means for the faithful depiction of the revolutionary world and of man's place in it, searched intensively in their various ways, but not one of them could claim that he had hit on the absolute truth or that his interpretation of events was the profoundest and the most accurate. Only time could pronounce the verdict, and it has done so. Permanent places in the history of Soviet literature now belong to works with various, sometimes diametrically opposite approaches, styles, and peculiarities of language. Alongside works in which powerful human types are portrayed, you will find pages creating the image not of a separate person or of separate people, but that of an undivided multitude, a mass. When reading such books as *The Iron Flood*, however, it is necessary to see not only what differentiates them from works concentrating on striking individuality, but also what inseparably binds them together with these works. Both in the former and the latter, the fate of the individual, whether as one of the crowd or in big close-up, is inconceivable outside his involvement with the fate of the people as a whole. These involvements may be expressed directly, may manifest themselves in very indirect ways, or may be realised only through the author's consciousness; but they form a powerful force field which is alone capable of polarising the spiritual qualities of the person being portrayed, that is, of illuminating his true worth in relationship with the outside world. Without such a relationship, psychological analysis may prove to be no more than a means of distorting the truth and, in this way, a form of misinformation.

The permanent relationship between a man's inner world and the outside world in action and above all the world of the feelings, views and desires of his people, is the real basis for the portrayal of the true spiritual dimensions of this or that character.

I am convinced that the point of departure and main criterion for the analysis of literary development are the principles according to which man is portrayed, whereas classifications according to subject and form are of secondary importance and derivative. If, therefore, we can define what kind of person is being portrayed by the writer of this or that

country, and from what standpoint, we can also define what is special about that country's literature. All the techniques of portrayal, all forms, all plot moves in literary works depend on one thing—the character of the man in literature and the principles of his portrayal. If, therefore, we solve the key problem, we naturally have the keys to the solution of all the other problems at all their different levels of significance and complexity.

The emergence of new principles for the portrayal of man was not accomplished all of a sudden in Soviet literature; it was a prolonged process.

Among the best writers during the period under discussion were Alexander Serafimovich and Demyan Bedny who, from the first days of the revolution, accepted its ideas as their own. But there were many others who could endorse Stanislavsky's viewpoint: "I am deeply grateful that when the events in progress caught us, the old hands of the Art Theatre company, somewhat confused, so that we did not understand everything that was happening, our government did not compel us to paint ourselves red at all costs, to become different from what we really were. We gradually began to understand the era, we gradually began to evolve, and our art evolved with us in a normal, natural way. Had it been otherwise, we would have been driven to mere 'revolutionary' hack work. But we wanted to treat the revolution otherwise: we wanted to see in depth not only how they were marching about with the red flag, we wanted to look into the revolutionary soul of the country."

Of some Russian writers, one may mention the extremely rapid development of their views (artistic ones included) towards socialist attitudes—Furmanov, Fadeyev, Demyan Bedny, Mayakovsky and Lavrenyov, for instance. With others, this process was more difficult and sometimes dramatically delayed (Alexei Tolstoy's road via emigration, for instance). None the less, it was inevitably accomplished and was one of the most typical features of the first stage of Soviet Russian literature.

In 1934, 17 years after October (is that a long or a short time in our stormy 20th century?) an event took place of historical importance for Soviet literature: the inner consolidation of the writers and their growing unity of outlook on the

tasks facing literature led to the formation of a single Union of Soviet Writers.

The first Congress, which was held in August 1934 under the chairmanship of Maxim Gorky, proclaimed the foundation of a new writers' organisation which was unprecedented in the history of world culture and which had chosen socialist realism as its creative method.

No one imposed the principles of socialist realism on the writers. On the contrary, a Resolution of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)¹ of 18 June 1925, "Party Policy on Literature", pointed to free competition of all styles and methods in our literature. However, the enormous possibilities latent in an art based on a progressive interpretation of the world and on the objective typification of characters, events and relationships (we call it socialist realism) manifested itself with such power and success in the work of vastly different creative personalities that the majority of writers eventually adopted this method themselves.

The reader is sure to notice that the overwhelming majority of excerpts printed here follow the realist trend in art. There are at least two fundamental reasons for this.

First, Russian Soviet literature continued in the great realist tradition of Russian classical literature—that of Pushkin, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov. In the first half of the 20s, remarkable works in various forms had already been written, such as *Chapayev* by Dmitry Furmanov, *The Iron Flood* by Alexander Serafimovich, *The Artamonovs* and *My Universities* by Maxim Gorky, the long poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin* by Vladimir Mayakovsky, *The Rout* by Alexander Fadeyev, and many others that became Soviet classics, all based on the principle of realist typification.

However, by no means all the writers of the first period applied the realist method to describe life as they saw it. Romanticism, futurism, symbolism, naturalism and many other methods and trends were characteristic of early Soviet Russian literature alongside realism. Writing illustrative of these is also represented here. The inception of the new literature was notable for the coexistence of various creative methods which,

¹ This was the name of the CPSU until December 1925.—*Ed.*

in free competition, revealed the possibilities inherent in them.

We now come to the second reason why the realist trend predominated in our literature: competition clearly showed up the weakness of many creative methods and their inability to express the new life with the depth, and on the scale, that it deserved. Time passed, and reality, above all historical reality, suggested to the writers, who were sincerely striving to reflect their unprecedented era in all its tremendous turmoil, that the work of many was clearly incommensurate with the magnitude of what was happening. This was due to an insufficiently clear and extremely vague grasp of what was happening in the country, and also to the weakness of their formalist or avant-garde techniques. The realist method prevailed in Soviet literature because of its latent possibilities.

The 20s and 30s may be seen in the history of Soviet Russian literature as the period when all the creative principles of the new literature, above all the great democratic conception of man with which I began this article, came into being, manifested themselves and successfully found fulfillment in exemplary works of art.

In the 20s and 30s, prose forms became prominent which gave an artistic interpretation of the recent past and of the present. Indicative of the remarkable maturity of the young literature were epic novels such as Gorky's *The Life of Klim Samgin*, Alexei Tolstoy's *Ordeal* and Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don*, work on which was successfully completed just before outbreak of the Great Patriotic War of 1941—1945.

The epic and lyrical forms of poetry flourished (they are represented in this half of the anthology by the verse of Bryusov, Blok, Demyan Bedny, Khlebnikov, Akhmatova, Pasternak, Mayakovsky, Yesenin, Bagritsky, Tikhonov, Svetlov, Lugovskoi and Isakovsky). The historical novel arose and powerfully affirmed itself in the reader's consciousness. "Second Lieutenant Snamely", a short story by Yury Tynyanov, gives a vivid impression of the brilliant talent shown by a writer who excelled in the art of historical narrative.

All the new dramatists have held the audience's attention with works as gifted as they were up-to-date.

Lyrical prose, satire, fantasy and phantasmagoria have won

the affection of the reader. The works of Mikhail Prishvin, Andrei Platonov, Mikhail Bulgakov, all represented here, would be an asset to any literature. These writers are individual and unique almost to excess. But their individuality shows through not in exotic trifles, but in their endeavour to fathom the processes of the age. Would it be possible, for instance, to imagine at the beginning of the 30s a more fierce, more implacable denunciation of fascism's inhumanity than Andrei Platonov's story "The Rubbish Wind"?... This is only one tale, but it so happens that the theme of the struggle with fascism was beginning to make itself heard more and more insistently in our young literature, and history has shown how penetrating the Soviet writers proved to have been.

There also came to the fore in Soviet literature a new and uncommon territory—children's literature, in which the works of Arkady Gaidar are particularly outstanding. His story "Timur and His Squad" started a powerful new social trend which is still active and has been spreading for decades. The hero of the tale is a teenager, Timur, a knight without fear or reproach. He sets so noble and infectious a moral example that what are called "Timur's squads" have been formed all over the country—that is, squads of adolescents and children who see it as their duty to help those in need. And if this help is rendered secretly, the greater the pleasure it brings to the Timur squad. I was myself the captain of a big Timur squad during the war. Many years have passed since then, but I shall never forget the joy with which we schoolchildren secretly dug the kitchen garden for the family of a soldier at the front, or sawed and piled up firewood for old ladies who had lost sons in the war, or obtained extra ration coupons for children who were weak with hunger...

This example has been quoted so as to stress once more the individuality of the new-born Soviet literature: its active nature, its love for characters helping to rebuild the world around them on principles of good.

I have already mentioned that the complex spiritual and historical life of the man of the people and his psychological world were revealed on an artistic level commensurate with the best classical models of previous periods in Russian and world literature. This innovation showed not only in the fact

that characters drawn from the people became numerically predominant in works of art, although this side of Soviet Russian literature is also extremely important. What matters is that in each of the works an important law of socially significant literature, having survived the test of time, manifested and asserted itself: behind each specific situation described, there loomed radical problems that were a source of concern to everybody without exception. The anthology includes excerpts from Fyodor Gladkov's *Cement*, the first of a number of books dealing with the transformation of social reality. We see how the subject of re-making the world is inseparably tied up with the artist's passionate interest in man's spiritual growth, the formation of a new morality, the growth in people of the feeling that they are the masters of the new world.

The end of the 20s and the beginning of the 30s saw the spectacular success of a form which might be called the novel about the growth of the new man, the creator of new and just relations in the world, man the maker. In subject matter, this could be the "industrial" novel: Leonid Leonov's *The River Sott*, Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Second Day*, Valentin Katayev's *Time Forward!*, Marietta Shaginyan's *Hydrocentral*, Alexander Malyshkin's *People from the Backwoods*, Vera Ketlinskaya's *Courage* or Yury Krymov's *The Tanker "Derbent"*. Human problems are handled in close association with those arising from the economic transformation of a once backward country. It could also be a novel about the transformation of life in the country (Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Uplifted*), or about the re-education of former juvenile delinquents (Anton Makarenko's *The Road to Life*). I think that the need for a new, morally pure person, inspired by his people, was expressed with the greatest force and vividness during these years in Nikolai Ostrovsky's remarkable novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, which ran to dozens of editions in the Soviet Union in a remarkably short space of time and has been translated into the languages of peoples all over the world.

To conclude this introduction to part one of the anthology let us consider one complex matter which concerns content and the formal peculiarities of Soviet Russian literature. I refer to the democratic style of the writers. Their books were written not for the snob or the aesthete, to whom literature is

merely a diversion, but for ordinary people. Yes, Soviet literature serves millions of readers, serves the whole people and not just an "upper ten thousand". The genesis or origin of this peculiarity of style is obvious: a literature that is democratic in its goals cannot be undemocratic in its language. But it should be noted that this simplicity, which Soviet Russian literature at its best has successfully achieved, is not oversimplification, not primitivisation, but the great simplicity of wisdom which comes to the man and the writer when he learns to fathom with his inner eye the very depths of events, characters and relations. It is precisely in this sense that Shakespeare is simple, as is Cervantes.

I would like to quote one telling example in support of this. There is a passage in the anthology from Alexander Fadeyev's novel, *The Rout*. He tells about events during the Civil War in the Far East, about the struggle with the interventionists and whiteguards, about the inspiration behind the heroic achievements accomplished in that struggle.

How does the moral world of the characters in *The Rout* tie up with the central conflict of the period described? In answering this question, it is necessary to acknowledge all the complexity and contradictoriness of the process that began in October, of transforming human morality. The tremendous transformation of the human psychology as the basic moral conflict of the era was mirrored not only in the young Soviet literature, but in other literatures throughout the world, in the work of many leading 20th century novelists. It is enough to recall the epics of the new age, such as, *Les Thibault* by R. Martin du Guard or Romain Rolland's *An Enchanted Soul*. The conflict between "I" and "We", between the philosophy of individualism and that of collectivism is, in the final analysis, the deep-lying cause behind the overwhelming majority of life's contradictions as reflected in 20th century literature. Fadeyev's *The Rout* is a clear and true mirror of that historically influenced struggle of opposing moral principles under conditions that were strained to the limit in the Civil War. The book reflects the basic types of human morality during the transitional period: the moral code of Levinson, Mechik and Morozka—the central characters of the story—includes diametrically opposite ethical standards and a morality that is unstable, but developing. Let us

consider the special way of counterposing these images which testifies to the artistic depth of Fadeyev's purpose. The fact is that, as a writer, Fadeyev took the most difficult path and was far from adopting any rectilinear scheme. After all, Levinson, consciously living for the good of the people, and the by no means irreproachable Morozka, with his spontaneous cameraderie, and the individualist Mechik, who contemptibly betrays his comrades—all three are on the same side in the Civil War. "Two worlds" are warring in the souls of people in the same camp! Needless to say, this treatment of the problem testifies to the universal truth of the concepts in *The Rout*, to its durability, to the fact that the conflict recorded by Fadeyev, making itself so keen felt during this period when the classes were in open collision, relates not only to the Civil War period, but has a far wider historical relevance. Abiding interest in *The Rout* is assured, in this way, by the deployment of the characters in the novel, a deployment which "hits on" certain deep-lying laws of human morality's development over a long period of time. These laws are still effective. The duel between the tendencies accented by Fadeyev continues. Again and again, one is amazed at the truly philosophical power of thought shown by a writer who was still only a young man at the time. But—and this is vitally important—without any sacrifice of philosophical depth and generalisation of portrayal, the book remains a book "for everybody". Democratic, simple in form, it has rightfully become part of the school and university curriculum.

But does not this also apply to other important books by Soviet Russian writers who combine depth of human understanding with a true ability to make their meaning clear to ordinary people? Attention to the intensive spiritual self-determination of personality in a harsh and beautiful world and a keen interest in the quest for moral truth are essential to the writer, as is the endeavour to convey the meaning of what is being accomplished to each reader without exception, to the whole people.

Between the two world wars, a new, hitherto unprecedented literature, deeply democratic in its inner aspirations as in its means of depiction arose and, thanks to the talent of its creators, gained momentum. It is truly astounding that in a historically very short space of time, the young literature

should have scaled the summits of human culture and created such original and varied works in every form. Emerging during a grim period in the history of our country, Soviet Russian literature rose to the proper study of mankind in the face of the new trials which were still waiting for it in the future.

Poetry

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Blok'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

(b. 1880, St. Petersburg—d.
1921, Petrograd)

One of the major poets of the 20th century and, as time is showing, one of the most typical of that revolutionary age.

The uniqueness of Alexander Blok's personality and talent may be understood if we compare the sophisticated, privileged milieu from which he emerged with the revolutionary ideas at which he ultimately arrived.

The future poet's father was Professor of Law at Warsaw University and his mother was a writer. Blok's childhood years were spent in the family of his grandfather, the Rector of St. Petersburg University, in St. Petersburg itself, and on the estate of Shakhmatovo outside Moscow. On graduating successfully from gymnasium, Blok studied in the philological faculty of St. Petersburg University. He married the daughter of Dmitry Mendeleyev, the great Russian chemist.

His early poetry was immune to the anxieties and anguish of the world outside, developing in an

atmosphere of lyrical exaltation and romantic idealism. He was carried away by the cult of the Eternal Feminine and strove for an understanding of mystic problems. In 1904, he published his first book of poems, *LINES TO THE BEAUTIFUL LADY*. Elevated and mysterious, the image of Woman in these poems is purified of everything earthly.

The irruption of the turbulent realities into Blok's symbolist poetry resulted from the tragic and bloodily suppressed 1905 revolution in Russia.

Blok's poetic ear and spiritual sensitivity compelled him to catch the notes of troubled discord in the reality around him. One after another, new collections of his verse appeared and articles on literary and theatrical matters were published. He became more and more noticeably preoccupied in his creative work with the idea of narrowing the gulf between the people and the intelligentsia. His quest for the intellectual's ways to the people was the inspiration for his drama *THE SONG OF FATE* (1908). With the growth of his poetic fame and with the appearance of still more poetry collections and new dramas, a foreboding of historical storms and world upheavals grew and gained strength in Alexander Blok's mind.

He was a versatile and complex poet. He would embody his premonitions in the image of a lonely traveller, blind in the night, or he would encourage his lyrical hero to

seek oblivion in love and wine, or he would write scathing satires. His long unfinished poem, *RETRIBUTION* is full of revolutionary forebodings.

It is entirely natural that this poet and humanist should have welcomed the February and then the Great October revolutions with unusual fervour. In January 1918, Blok summoned: "With all your body, with all your heart, with all your mind—listen to the Revolution" (from his article, "The Intelligentsia and the Revolution"). His poem *THE TWELVE*, written in 1918, is a vivid memorial of that era. It is imbued with revolutionary romanticism, with the inspiration of restructuring life; but it took the intuition of genius to discern, at that initial stage, the various forces of revolution; on the one hand, constructive, stern, marching with a "powerful stride"; on the other, elemental and ready to swamp everything....

Blok saw the revolution unleashed and, as he conceived it, sweeping the whole world along with it like the storm wind and the blizzard; But he saw above all its holiness, its lofty humanity of purpose. Not for nothing are the symbolic twelve "Gallant Reds" directly associated with the twelve apostles, and their thorny path, in full conformity with Blok's symbolist and romantic poetics, is illumined by the higher justice and love for mankind which were personified for the poet by the image of Christ.

If it were necessary to com-

pile a World Anthology of 20th century literature containing only the most significant artistic achievements in which the greatest events of the era were reflected, Alexander Blok's THE TWELVE would undoubtedly be included, however compact that Anthology might be....

The Twelve

1

Black evening.
White snow.
Wind! Wind!
Careful, man, or down you go.
Wind... wind...
Roaring the wide world over!

The white snow eddies
The white snow hisses
On sheets of murderous ice.
People slither
And slip on the ice...
Watch out there! Oh, poor fellow!

From window to window
A cable stretched
With a streamer attached:
"All power to the Constituent Assembly!"
Grannie stares with frightened eyes,
Can't imagine what it signifies.
"What's it doing up there,
That silly old rag of a placard?
Think of the knickers the kiddies could wear,
And them going round half-naked..."
Grandma, henwise, flaps and flutters
Over to the snow-drift's yonder side.
"Mother of Christ, preserve us!
The Bolshies'll murder us all in bed!"
A wind that flays!
The frost, if anything, worse!
And the bourgeois at the crossroads
Digs his frozen nose in fur.

But who might this be? Long, lank hair,
And muttering at the vacant air:
"Traitors! Traitors!
Woe to Russia!"
Must be a writer or a
Soap-box orator...

Beyond the snow-drift, on his own
Stands one with priestly garb on...
Wherefore art so woebegone,
Comrade parson?

Remember how majestically
Belly-first you'd pace,
With the cross upon your belly
Beaming at the populace?

The lady in the astrakhan
Walks up, accosts another:
"We sobbed as only lovers can..."
Slip, slither, and
Flop—she's over!

Easy, easy,
Ups-a-daisy!

The wind is merry
And vicious and gay;
He mows pedestrians
Over like hay;
Rips, wrenches, and yanks
The great streamer away:
"All power to the Constituent Assembly!"
And snatches on his way:

"So we organised a meeting
Here inside this building...
Held a discussion,
Passed a resolution:
Ten for a moment, twenty for the night...
And not one kopek under that...
Fair enough? All right..."

Late evening.
Empty street.
Beggar shuffling
Ill-shod feet,
And the wind screaming...

“Lonesome, dearie?
On your ownsome?
Come to bed!”

Bread!
What’s ahead?
Pass by!

A black, black sky.

Rage, rage, bitter rage
Seething in the heart...
Black rage, holy rage...

Comrade, be on
Your guard!

2

The wind runs wild, the snowflakes beat.
Twelve men go marching down the street.

Black rifle-slings on shoulders gleaming;
Fires all round them flaming, flaming...
Fags a-dangle, caps askew—
You’d think they were a convict crew!
Liberty! Liberty!
We
Ain’t
Got no Cross!
Rat-tat-tat!

It’s chilly, comrades, it’s chilly!

“Johnny’s in a pub with Katie...”
“Kerensky rubles in her garter...”

“In the money, like I told you!
Once our Johnny, now a soldier!”

“Hey, Johnny, son-of-a-bourgeois-bitch, you
Kiss *my* girl and see what hits you!”

Liberty! Liberty!
We
Ain't
Got no Cross!
Johnny's having fun with Kate.
What can Kate be playing at?

Rat-tat-tat!
Lights all round them shining, shining...
Rifle-slings on shoulders gleaming...

Keep in step with the revolution!
Enemy watching—proceed with caution!

Comrade, have courage! Keep hold of your rifle!
Let's give Holy Russia a bloody good bellyful!

Stolid old
Solid old
Fat-arsed
Russia!

She
Ain't
Got no Cross!

3

So the lads all went and hied them
For to join the gallant Reds
For to join the gallant Reds
For to lose their gallant heads!

Sweet life, you are so bitter,
So bitter-sweet you are!
Greatcoat torn and tattered
And a rifle made in Austria!

Bourgeois, bourgeois, you beware
When we set the world on fire
World on fire with flames of blood—
Grant us thy blessing, O Lord!

4

Snowflakes fly, the coachman cries,
Johnny and Katie go spanking by—
Swank electric battery-lamp
Bobbing on the cab-shafts...
Mind your backs!

In an army greatcoat, Johnny,
With his stupid physiognomy,
Twirls and twirls his black mustachios,
Twirls and twiddles
And jokes and fiddles...

Good old Johnny—ain't he tough!
Good old Johnny—can't he bluff!
Holding Katie in his arms,
Trying out his charms...

Head flung back in sheer delight,
Pretty teeth all pearly white...
Oh, Katie, Katie, darling Katie,
Little snub-nosed Katie...

5

Just below your neckline, Katie,
There's a knife-slash, newly scarred.
Just below your bosom, Katie,
Skin and flesh are sorely marred!

Hey, hey, dance away!
Come and see that ankle-play!

Frilly undies, fair and fetching—
Fetch away, then, fetch away!
For the officers a-letching—
Letch away, then, letch away!

Hey, hey, letch away!
Kill your conscience for a day!

Katie, have you clean forgotten
Him that hadn't time to bolt
From my knife? Or does your rotten
Memory need a little jolt?

Hey, hey, jolt away
Through the night till break of day!

Pretty clothes, it was, and chocolates,
Swish cadets and Army swanks...
Now it's pride of all the privates
And the darling of the ranks!

Hey, hey, sin away!
Sin'll keep you young and gay!

6

The driver comes galloping back again,
And shouts, and roars, and hollers amain...

Stop, stop, there! Andy, lend a hand!
Quick, Peter! Get them from behind!

Rat-tararat-tat-tat-tat-tat!
The snow spits upwards in their tracks!

The cab—with Johnny inside—is bolting.
Let's try another! Ram your bolt in!

Rat-tararat! I'll make you smart
.....
For pinching someone else's tart!

So dodge me, would you? Well, don't worry,
I'll settle up with you tomorrow!

But what of Katie? Dead, stone dead!
Shot right through the bleeding head!

Well, Katie, happy? Not a word...
Then lie there on the snow, you turd!...

Keep in step with the revolution!
Enemy watching—proceed with caution!

So the Twelve, with rifles shouldered,
 Carry on into the night:
 Only one—the hapless murderer—
 Ghastly pale, as if in fright.

Faster, faster, and still faster
 Urges he his hurried pace:
 Round his neck a woollen muffler,
 Horror written on his face.

“Why so glum and gloomy, comrade?”
 “Why so miserable, mate?”
 “Why so dismal and downhearted?
 Conscience-stricken over Kate?”

“Once I loved that woman, comrades,
 Till I thought my heart would bust...
 Used to spend in her embraces
 Nights of passion, nights of lust...

“All because there was a love-spark
 In those laughing eyes of hers,
 All because there was a birth-mark
 On the shoulder that I kissed,
 Like a fool, I pulled the trigger, went stark
 Mad and shot her... Christ!”

“Well, of all the blinking blether!
 Here’s a proper rigmarole!
 Must we hang around forever
 While you vivisect your soul?
 Now then, pull yourself together!
 Try a bit of self-control!”

“This is not the time to spend in
 Mothering the like of you!
 There’s much bigger things impending;
 We’ve got trouble coming too!”

Peter slows his pace a little...
 Not in such a frantic hurry...

Seems to brighten up a little...
Now he's looking almost merry...

Hey, hey!
Fun will drive your cares away!

Lock yourselves inside your flats!
Looters lurking in the streets!

Open every basement door!
Welcome in the starving poor!

8

Sweet life, you are so deadly,
So deadly dull you are,
So full of nausea!

I'll sit on a fence and watch a bit,
Watch a bit,
Watch a bit...

Ruffle me hair and scratch a bit,
Scratch a bit,
Scratch a bit...

Crack a few nuts and munch a bit,
Munch a bit,
Munch a bit...

Pull out me dagger and slash a bit,
Slash a bit,
Slash a bit...

Fly away, bourgeois, fly away home!
I'll drink a blood-and-water
To the landlord's dark-eyed daughter
For the evening when I caught her...

Lord, spare the soul of this thine handmaiden.
Nausea!

9

No sound of life throughout the city,
The Nevsky tower is strangely quiet.
There's no policemen left on duty—
Come on, let's have a real old riot!

The bourgeois stands there at the cross-roads,
And digs his frozen nose in fur,
While at his feet, with tail tucked under,
Cringes a mangy mongrel cur.

The bourgeois stands there, as if hungry,
Just stands there like a question mark;
The old world, like a starving mongrel,
Cowers at his feet, too cold to bark.

10

Now the blizzard's really blowing;
Blizzard, hoy! Blizzard, hey!
Can't see where your mates are going
Half-a-dozen feet away!

Whirling in a white maelstrom...
Soaring skyward in a column...

"What a snowstorm! Jesu mercy!"
"Peter, don't be such a sissy!
Did your holy bag of tricks
Save you from a fine old fix?
Superstitious bleeder, aren't you!
Use your ruddy common, can't you!
Who's got hands as red as red?
Who shot little Katie dead?"
"Keep in step with the revolution!
Enemy watching—proceed with caution!"

Onward, onward, you masses,
Working classes!

11

...So the Twelve go marching on,
Unsanctified, unblessed...
Grim and ruthless, every man
Ready for the worst...

Steely-glinting rifle-barrels
Levelled at the unseen foe...
Into empty streets and alleys
Where alone the storm-winds blow...
Plunging knee-deep and regardless
Through the boot-ensnaring snow...

Red flag flying
Right ahead.

Sound of marching's
Measured tread.

Foeman watching...
Keep your head!

And the blizzard in their faces
Never ceases
Night or day.

Onward, you masses,
Working classes!

12

...Onward still the Twelve go striding...
"Something's moving! Who goes there?"
Nothing but the red flag riding
Through the snowflake-flurried air...

Right in front—a freezing snow-drift...
"Something's moving! Who goes there?"
Nothing but a starving mongrel
Cringing slyly in the rear...

“Scat, you tyke, or else I’ll stick your
Belly with my bayonet blade!
Old World, hop it—else I’ll prick your
Filthy mangy mongrel hide!...”

Snarling like a wolf that’s hungry,
Tail tucked under; won’t stay clear;
Shivering mongrel, homeless mongrel...
“Answer, will you! Who goes there?”

“Who’s that with the red flag flying?”
“Try and spot him if you can!”
“Who’s that dodging round the buildings
Like a convict on the run?”

“I’ll get hold of you, don’t worry!
Whether you give up or not!
You’ll be for it, comrade! Hurry!
Come on out, or else be shot!”

Bang! And nothing but the echo
Rings across from house to house...
Nothing but the muffled laughter
Of the storm-wind in the snows...

Rat-tat-tat!
Rat-tat-tat!

...Onward still the Twelve go striding;
In their rear—a starving cur;
And with bloody banner leading,
Hidden by the howling storm,
Safe from human hurt or harm,
In a chaplet of white roses,

Stepping through the pearly snowdust,
Shrouded in the snowy mist,
In the distance—Jesus Christ.

January, 1918

Translated by Alex Miller

A large, stylized handwritten signature of V. Mayakovsky in black ink. The signature is highly expressive, with long, sweeping strokes and a prominent horizontal line extending from the middle of the name.

(b. 1893, village of
Bagdadi, Georgia—d. 1930,
Moscow)

Vladimir Mayakovsky was a revolutionary in the details of his life, in his poetic innovation, and in the content of his work.

While still at gymnasium, he took part in demonstrations, notably in a schoolboys' strike. In Moscow, where his family moved after the death of his father, a forester, he was drawn into the underground struggle. In 1908, he joined the Bolshevik Party. He was imprisoned in 1908 and twice in 1909. He was discharged from prison in 1910 as a minor. Once at liberty, he decided to dedicate himself to revolutionary art—revolutionary as he then understood it. Entering into alliance with the Futurists, he soon became their most important writer. The Futurists attracted him with their rebellion against everything bourgeois, with their paradoxically sharpened idea of innovation.

Mayakovsky's long poem, *CLOUD IN PANTS* (1915), may be regarded as the manifesto in which he rejected the old world. "Down with

your love, down with your art, down with your system, down with your religion"—these are the "four cries" of the four parts of the poem, as he put it himself.

In his autobiography, *I MYSELF*, Mayakovsky wrote about the October Revolution: "To accept or not to accept? For me, there was no such question. My revolution. I went to the Smolny. Worked. Everything that came my way."

Mayakovsky's work after October was infinitely varied. The champion of the Revolution, he was engaged in building the new life and the new art. He gave public poetry readings, wrote film scripts and plays. For the 1st Anniversary of the October Revolution, Meyerhold staged, at the Theatre of Musical Drama, Mayakovsky's play "Mystery-Bouffe", an unusual heroic, epic and satirical portrayal of the epoch in the spirit of the popular grotesque show.

Mayakovsky repeatedly appeared in print as a poet; he also worked with infatigable energy at public agitation, putting out revolutionary posters for which he frequently did the drawings and the captions as well. This work stimulated him to enter more deeply into the life of the people; it taught him how to write about current events and make his forms accessible. Mayakovsky's personal experiences, according to him, were directly connected with the major historical events of the times. While actively affirming the new, he lambasted with

scathing sarcasm everything that prevented his homeland from moving along the path of the revolution. His satirical poems of that time are Soviet classics of their kind.

From 1922 onwards, Mayakovsky went abroad a number of times, and these journeys inspired the magnificent cycles of his foreign works. Possessing a huge, passionate and many-sided nature, he worked at home and abroad with extreme intensity. He wrote the long lyrical poems, *I LOVE, IT*, the lyrical epics *VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN* and *FINE!*; he also published dozens of shorter poems in heroic, lyrical and satirical vein. He wrote comedies and publicistic articles and took part in specific journalistic projects and in debates on the nature of art.

More brilliantly than any other poet, he personified the message of the revolutionary transformation of the world.

Engaged in endless battles and literary controversies, Mayakovsky remained in his personal life a solitary man, vulnerable and hypersensitive to the end. "Love's boat has got wrecked on the rocks of life, as the saying goes, the incident's over," he said in the poem written just before his death. The tribune, the voice of the revolutionary struggle for the renewal of the world and art was himself a man in the world of men. There is a ring of sincerity about everything that he wrote in his life and that is why he had so powerful an impact on 20th-century verse.

Left March

For sailors

March, march out to the fore!
Away with speech-making lousy!
Quieter, orators!
You
have the floor,
Comrade Mauser!
Too long we've lived by the laws
Adam and Eve left.
Run down old History's horse!
Left!
Left!
Left!

Ahoy, blue blouses!
Steer forth
over the roaring ocean.
Steam away, dreadnoughts!
Or
have your keels gone blunt without motion?
Let the British lion brandish
his crown,
and roar till he's dumb and deaf.
The Commune will never be vanquished.
Left!
Left!
Left!

There
beyond mountains of woe,
a land of sunshine spreads wide.
Past famine,
past martyrdom—go
crashing, million-strong stride!
Let hirelings by war-lords sent
surround us for murder and theft.
Russia fall under the Entente?
Left!
Left!
Left!

Eagle eyes to be blurred?
Us to gaze back at the past?
Round the throat of the world
proletarian fingers, clinch fast!
Chest for'ard! Show 'em your might!
Let the sky by banners be cleft!
Who starts to march with the right?
Left!
Left!
Left!

1918

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Kindness to Horses

Hoofs plod
seeming to sing,

Grab.
Rib.
Grub.
Rob.

Ice-shod,
wind a-swing,
the street skidded.
On the roadway a cob
toppled,
and immediately,
loafer after loafer,
sweeping the Kuznetsky¹
with trousers bell-bottomous,
came crowding.
Laughter rang over and over,
"Horse flopped!
Boo, hippopotamus!"
The Kuznetsky guffawed.

¹ *Kuznetsky Most*—fashionable Moscow street.— *Tr.*

Only I
didn't mix my voice in the bestiality.
I came up, glimpsed in the horse's eye:
the street, upturned,
swam in all its reality.
I came up and saw
huge drop after drop
roll down the muzzle,
hide in the growth...
And an animal anguish
I couldn't stop
spilled out of me, rippling,
and flooded us both.
"Now, don't, please, horsie!
You know what remorse is?
They're human,
but why do you suppose you're worse?
Pet,
we're all of us a little bit horses,
each of us in his own way's a horse."
Perhaps she didn't need a nurse, old naggie,
perhaps even laughed at my words
—too trite!—
but the horse made an effort,
heaved,
up-dragging,
neighed, and went on,
all right.
Tail a-swishing,
great big baby,
she came light-hearted
back to her stall,
and she felt a colt—just two years, maybe,—
and life worth living,
despite it all.

1918

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

(Excerpt from the poem)

Let the waiting
 be stretched out
 to desperation,
Yet I see it—
 clear as hallucination.
So clear,
 it seems,
 just finish with these rhymes
and lo—
 you land
 in the most magnificent of times.
Not for me
 to query
 which and what.
I see,
 I see it clearly,
 to a dot!
Air on air,
 as if it's stone on stone,
impervious
 to crumbling and rust,
it towers beyond the ages,
 all aglow,
the workshop for reviving human dust.
Here he is, the chemist,
 silent,
 lofty-browed,
wrinkling his nose,
 a new experiment contriving.
Through the World Who's Who
 he leafs
 and thinks aloud:
“XXth century.
 Let's look who's worth reviving.
Mayakovsky...
 surely not among the brightest,
Decidedly,
 his face is far too plain.”
Then from today's worn page
 I'll holler to the scientist,

Stop turning over pages!

Make me live again!

Hope Put a heart in me,

knock thought into my skull,
pump blood into my veins—

give me new birth.

I had no chance of loving,

living to the full.

Believe,

I didn't get my earthly share on earth.
I'm six foot four.

Who wants such stature when
for jobs like mine

a guinea-pig would suffice.

Caged in a house,

I scribbled with a pen
crammed in a room-hole

fit perhaps for mice.

I'd take any old job

and never ask a bob!

Clean,

sweep,

wash,

scrub

or simply run around.

Why,

I'd be glad to get a doorman's job
if doormen

in your days

will still be found.

A jolly chap I was;

much sense in being jolly

when all we knew

was misery and rigour.

These days,

when people bare their teeth,

it's solely

to sink 'em in,

to bite,

to snarl,

to snigger.

Anything may happen—
any sort of trouble.

Call me, do,
for joking helps superbly.
I'll amuse you
till you actually bubble
with ting-a-linging allegory
and hyperbole.

I loved...
Sure, raking up the past
is not much use.

(Painful?
Never mind!
At least pain lives
when all has ceased.)

I did love beasts, though.
Have you still got zoos?
Then let me be a keeper for your beasts.
I love the creatures.

When I spot a pup—
there's a funny one—
all bald—
hangs round the baker's—

I feel like I could cough my own liver up:
Here, doggie,
don't be shy, dear, take this!

ove And then, perhaps,
some day
down pathways
that I'll sweep
(she too loved beasts)
she'll come to see the zoo,
smiling the same
as on the photo that I keep—
they'll bring her back to life—
she's nice enough,
she'll
do...

Your umptieth century
will leave them all behind,
trifles
that stung one's heart
in a buzzing swarm,

and then
 we'll make up
 for these loveless times
 through countless midnights,
 starry,
 sweet and warm.

Revive me,
 if for nothing else,
 because

I,
 poet,
 cast off daily trash
 to wait for you.

Revive me—
 never mind under what clause.

Revive me, really,
 let me live my due,
 to love—
 with love no more a sorry servant
 of matrimony,
 lust
 and daily bread,
 but spreading out
 throughout the Universe
 and further,
 forsaking sofas,
 cursing boudoir and bed.

No more to beg
 for one day as a dole
 and then to age
 in endless sorrow drowned,
 but to see all the globe
 at the first call
 of "Comrade!"
 turn in glad response around.

No more a martyr
 to that hole one calls one's hearth,
 but to call everybody
 sister,
 brother,

to see your closest kin
 in all the earth,
aye, all the world
 to be your father and your mother.

1922-1923

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin
(Excerpts from the poem)

*To the Russian
Communist Party
I dedicate this poem.*

The time has come.
 I begin
 the story of Lenin.
Not
 because the grief
 is on the wane,
but because
 the shock of the first moment
has become
 a clear-cut,
 weighed and fathomed pain.
Time,
 speed on,
 spread Lenin's slogans in your whirl!
Not for us
 to drown in tears,
 whatever happens.
There's no one
 more alive
 than Lenin in the world,
our strength,
 our wisdom,
 surest of our weapons.

People
 are boats,
 although on land.
While life
 is being roughed
all sorts
 of trash
 from the rocks and sand
stick
 to the sides of our craft.
But then,
 having broken
 through the storm's mad froth,
one sits
 in the sun
 for a time
and cleans off
 the tousled seaweed growth
and oozy
 jellyfish slime.
I
 go to Lenin
 to clean off mine
to sail on
 with the revolution.
I fear
 these eulogies
 line upon line
like a boy
 fears falsehood and delusion.
They'll rig up an aura
 round any head;
the very idea—
 I abhor it
that such a halo,
 poetry-bred,
should hide
 Lenin's real,
 huge,
 human forehead.

Where to get
the very words we need?
We've
seven days
to spend,
twelve hours
for diverse uses.
Life must begin—
and end.
Death won't accept
excuses.
But if it's no more
a matter of hours,
if the calendar measure
falls short,
"Epoch"
is a usual
comment of ours,
"Era"
or something of the sort.
We
sleep
at night,
busy
around
by day,
each grinds his water
in his own pet mortar
and so
fritters life away.
But if,
single-handed,
somebody can
turn the tide
to everyone's profit
we utter
something like
"Superman",
"Genius"
or "Prophet".
We
don't ask much of life,

Had he
 been kingly or godly indeed
 I'd never spare myself,
 on protest bent;
 I'd rise a clamour
 in hall and street
 against the crowds,
 speeches,
 processions
 and laments.
 I'd find
 the words
 for a thundering condemnation,
 and while
 I'd be trampled on,
 I and my cries,
 I'd bomb
 the Kremlin
 with demands
 for resignation,
 hurling
 blasphemy
 into the skies.
 But calm
 by the coffin
 Dzerzhinsky¹
 appears.
 Today
 he could easily
 dismiss
 the guard.
 In millions of eyes
 shines nothing
 but tears,
 not running down cheeks,
 but frozen hard.
 Your divinity's decease
 won't rouse a mote of feeling.

¹ Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky—then People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, staunch follower of Lenin.—*Tr.*

No!

Today
real pain
chills every heart.

We're burying
the earthliest of beings
that ever came to play
an earthly part.

Earthly, yes;
but not the earth-bound kind
who'll never peer
beyond the precincts of their sty.

He took in
all the planet
with his mind,

saw things
out of reach
for the common eye.

Though like you and I
in every detail,
his forehead rose
a taller,

steeper tower;
the thought-dug wrinkles
round the eyes
went deeper,

the lips looked firmer,
more ironical than ours.

Not the satrap's firmness
that'll grind us,
tightening the reins,
beneath a triumph-chariot's wheels.

With friends
he'd be
the very soul of kindness,

with enemies
as hard
as any steel.

He, too,
had illnesses
and weaknesses
to fight

and hobbies
just the same as we have,
reader.
For me it's billiards, say,
to whet the sight;
for him it's chess—
more useful
And turning for a leader.
face about
from chess
yesterday's dumb pawns to living foes,
he led
to a war of classes
until a human,
working-class dictatorship arose
to checkmate Capital
and crush its prison-castle.
We and he
had the same ideals to cherish.
Then why is it,
no kin of his,
I'd welcome death,
crazy with delight,
would gladly perish
so that he might draw
a single breath?
And not I alone.
Who says I'm better than the rest?
Not a single soul of us,
I reckon,
in all the mines
and mills
from East
to West
would hesitate
to do the same
at the slightest beckon.
Instinctively,
I shrink
from tram-rails
to quiet corners,

giddy
 as a drunk
 who sees the lees.
 Who would mind
 my puny death
 among these mourners
 lamenting
 the enormousness
 of his decease?
 With banners
 and without,
 they come,
 as if all Russia
 had again
 turned nomad for a while.
 The House of Unions¹
 trembles with their motion.
 What can be the reason?
 Wherefore?
 Why?
 Snow-tears
 from the flags' red eyelids
 run.
 The telegraph's gone hoarse
 with humming mournful
 rumours.
 Who is he?
 Where from?
 What has he done,
 this man,
 the most humane
 of all us humans?
 Ulyanov's short life
 is well known
 to men in
 every country,
 among every race.
 But the longer biography
 of Comrade Lenin

¹ The House of Unions—historic public building in Moscow where Lenin lay in state in January 1924.—*Tr.*

has still
to be written,
rewritten
and retraced.

1924

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Brooklyn Bridge

Coolidge, old boy,
give a whoop of joy!
What's good is good—
no need for debates.
Blush red with my praise,
swell with pride
till you're
spherical,
though you be ten times
United States
of America.
As to Sunday church
the pious believer
walks,
devout,
by his faith bewitched,
so I,
in the grisly mirage
of evening
step, with humble heart,
on to Brooklyn Bridge.
As a conqueror rides
through the town he crushes
on a cannon
by which himself's a midge,
so—
drunk with the glory—
all life be as luscious—
I clamber,

proud,
on to Brooklyn Bridge.
As a silly painter
into a museum Virgin
infatuated,
plunges
his optics' fork,
so I
from a height on heaven verging
look
through Brooklyn Bridge at New York.
New York,
till evening stifling and bewildering,
forgets
both its sultriness
and its height,
and only
the naked soul
of a building
will show
in a window's translucent light.
From here
the elevators
hardly rustle,
which sound alone,
by the distance rubbered,
betrays the trains
as off they bustle,
like crockery
being put by
in a cupboard.
Beneath,
from the river's far-off mouth,
sugar
seems carted from mills by peddlars;
it's the windows of boats
bound north and south—
tinier
that the tiniest pebbles.
I pride
in the stride
of this steel-wrought mile.

Embodied in it
my visions come real—
in the striving
for structure
instead of style,
in the stern, shrewd balance
of rivets and steel.
If ever
the end of the world
should arrive,
and chaos
sweep off
the planet's
last ridge,
with the only
lonely
thing to survive
towering over debris
this bridge,
then,
as out of a needle-thin bone
museums
rebuild dinosaurs,
so future's geologist
from this bridge alone
will remodel
these days
of ours.

He'll say:
this mile-long iron arch
welded
oceans and prairies together.
From here old Europe
in westward march
swished
to the winds
the last Indian feather.
This bridge will remind
of machines by its pattern.
Consider—
could anyone with bare hands
planting

1925

80

Khrenov's Story of Kuznetskstroy and Its Builders

1,000,000 waggons of building material will be delivered here. A giant steel mill, colossal collieries and a city for hundreds of thousands will be set up here in five years' time....

(Conversation)

The clouds go roving
 through the sky.
The drizzle
 grips the heart.
In cramping damp
 the workers lie
beneath an ancient cart.
Though all is soaked
 both near and far
they whisper,
 anyhow,
“There’ll be
 a garden-city here
in just four years
 from now.”
Rope-thick,
 the rain
 lays on like whips.
The leaden night’s like ink.
With mud
 the workers’ clothing drips.
The splinter-torches
 blink.
Their lips
 turn blue as plums
 with chill,
but whispers every voice:
“That garden-city will be—
 will!
No doubt about it, boys!”
The sodden ground
 steams like hot stew:

poor comfort
 in the wet.
In semi-dark
 the workers chew
the bread-like stuff
 they get.
Yet still
 their whisper one can hear
though loud
 the raindrops fall—
“There’ll be a garden-city here
with lights
 and flowers
 and all.
The burst and boom of dynamite
will shoo away
 the bear,
while monster-mines
 in quest of coal
the bowels of earth
 will tear.
Pitch high the walls of factories!
Let whistles wheeze with steam!
With hundred-sun-power furnaces
Siberia will gleam.
We’ll live in handsome houses
 all,
unrationed bread
 we’ll eat,
and far beyond
 the old Baikal
the scared taiga’ll retreat.”
The workers’
 whisper
 grew and grew
above the rain-cloud herds.
And GARDEN-CITY
 were the two
most clear and frequent words.
That garden
 shall be blooming,

that city must
 arise
when Soviet Russia
 has such men
as these before my eyes.

1929

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

A large, stylized, handwritten signature of 'S. Yesenin' in black ink. The signature is highly decorative, with long, sweeping strokes and a prominent horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

(b. 1895, village of
Konstantinovo near Ryazan—
d. 1925, Leningrad)

Born into an ordinary peasant family, Sergei Yesenin had a natural gift for pure lyrical poetry.

He travelled a great deal in his lifetime: to the North, the South, and the East of Russia; in 1922-1923, with his wife, the legendary dancer Isidore Duncan, through Germany, France, Belgium, Italy and the USA. Before the revolution, he frequented the high society salons and met poets whose attitude to him was condescendingly patronising. After the revolution his circle of friends was very broad and diverse. He was attracted by symbolism and imaginism, paid tribute to mythology and often drew on religious motifs for his poetry.

What mattered most about him, however, was something else—as time is proving with increasing cogency—he was, and still is, the singer of human feelings, of the life of simple folk, of Russian nature. In spite of everything, Yesenin had an inner source of strength that, even in his darkest hours, did not allow him

to lose faith and this was his love for his homeland. When he wrote, "I love my country, I love it very much!", it was not just a poetic phrase; it expressed all that was most precious and sincere in him.

Yesenin the poet had his ups and downs. He himself was prone to error and to illumination as well. But the fundamental thing about him was not his utopias and his despairs, but the bright, joyous, and sad world of his poetry, his lyrical hero who could love the Homeland, woman and the domestic hearth so tenderly and sensitively. Reading Yesenin one cannot but fall under the spell of this truly great, good, beautiful and sincere person. Like the great poets of other ages and peoples, Yesenin found wisdom without ever losing a childlike vision on the world.

Yesenin saw and depicted Russia at a time of immense revolutionary breakup, and he depicted it through the eyes of a man who was far from fully aware, in intellectual terms, of what was happening, but was able to express universal human joy and universal human sorrow in lyrical poetry of such sublime beauty that it has won a permanent place in the cultural heritage of all peoples.

I don't sorrow, I don't weep or call.
All will pass like apple-blossom smoke
With the gold of autumn tinted is my soul,
And my youth can never be revoked.

My poor heart, already touched with chill,
Will not keep up its excited beat,
And the wonderland of birchen chintz
Will not lure me for a tramp in my bare feet.

And my restless spirit less, less often
Stirs me up to give my passions vent.
Gone the thrill, the vehemence has softened,
And the freshet of emotions is long spent.

Of desires I have now become more sparing.
Have I dreamt life up, or have I lived indeed?
Seems I'd galloped through it one spring morning
In the ringing air upon a charmed pink steed.

In this world of ours all of us are mortal,
From the maple trees the copper softly pours...
Still, for granting me to burgeon 'ere I wilted,
Blessed by my fate for now and evermore.

1921

Translated by Olga Shartse

* * *

The golden grove is silent, it has had its say
In its amusing, jolly birchen tongue.
The cranes fly sadly over it upon their way,
But they leave everyone behind without a pang.

And who is everyone? Wayfarers in this world,
We come into a home and leave it all too soon.
And all those who are gone are dreamily recalled
By this sad hempfield and the wide full moon....

I stand alone amid the emptiness and skyward gaze,
The wind is carrying the flock of cranes off course....
I'm full of memories about my younger days,
But nothing makes me feel any remorse.

I think without regret of all the years I squandered,
And of the lilactime of my poor soul.
A fire's burning in the garden—it's a rowan,
But it can warm no one. its flames are cold.

The berry clusters by it won't get scorched,
The yellowness will not prevent new grass from growing....
I stand and drop these melancholy words,
Just as a tree will drop its leaves in autumn.

And if the wind and time will sweep them up one day
Into a pile of rubbish only fit to burn,
Just say the golden grove has had its say
In its sweet-sounding, jolly birchen tongue...

1924

Translated by Olga Shartse

Soviet Rus

*Sergei Yesenin
to A. Sakharov*

The hurricane has passed. Few have survived,
So many old friends, far too many you find gone.
Now, after eight long years, I have again arrived
At my old village, in my childhood home.

Whom shall I call? With whom am I to share
The melancholy joy that I am living?
The very windmill here broods with a sleepy air,
A timber bird, its one wing slowly swinging...

I am a stranger, known to no one here,
Long since forgotten by the folks who knew me.
And where my home once stood—tier upon tier
Of dust and ashes, ashes, dust and ruins.

Yet life goes on,
And people young and old
Are bustling all around me, but there's none
That I could tip my hat to, not a soul
Whose eyes would offer me a welcome home.

And thoughts like busy bees swarm in my mind:
Just what is home? Your dreams? No more than
dreams?

To most I'm just a pilgrim of a morbid kind
From God knows where appearing on the scene.

Who, me?
A citizen of this place,
This village which, if ever, will be starred
Only because it's here a woman by God's grace
Gave birth to me, to Russia's scapegrace bard!

Then, to my heart the voice of reason speaks:
"Come to your senses, everything's all right.
There is no cause for you to feel so piqued,
Another generation's kindled its new light.

You have begun to fade a bit, old chap.
And other songs are sung these days by others,
Their songs will be more interesting, perhaps.
The world—not just the village—is their Mother."

Oh Motherland! How funny I've become.
My hollow cheeks are flushed, I cannot understand
My fellow citizens, theirs is a foreign tongue,
And I—I am an alien in my native land!

The villagers, as once they came to church,
Have gathered at the volost office on a Sunday
To talk of life. They don't say very much,
Their dialogue careless, and the topics mundane.

The day is done. The sunset unbewitching
Has thinly sprayed the greying field with gilt.
Below the gates, the poplars in the ditches
Look like so many heifers' legs stuck in the silt.

A lame Red Army man with face by nature stony,
Now wrinkled up with memory and thought,
Sedately tells the gathering about Budyonny,
And how the Reds for Perekop had fought.

"We went for him, we sure did go, and how!
We made Crimea hot for him, the so-and-so..."
The maples wrinkle up the ears of their long boughs,
And in the semi-darkness women gasp in awe...

The village Komsomols are coming down the hill
With concertinas and all hollering the verse
Of Demyan Bedny, with a verve and will
To wake the dead and rouse the universe.

That's Russia for you!
And I used to yell
About my friendship with the people. What the hell!
Nobody needs my poems any more,
And I myself am nothing but a bore.

Ah well. My home, forgive me all my wrongs,
If I was any use to you my conscience will be
quelled.

And never mind that I'm no longer sung,
You know I sang you when you were unwell.

All I accept.
All, absolutely all.
I am prepared to walk a trodden track,
To Mayday and October I will pledge my soul,
But there is just one thing I must keep back:
My lyre.
I will not give it to another,
Not to my wife, not to my friend, not to my mother.
To me alone its music it confided,
To me alone its tender songs it sang.

Grow strong in body, blossom out, young poets!
You have a different life, you sing another tune,
While I, I'll go alone to regions unbeknownst,
My spirit mutinous at last subdued.

And when the enmity of tribes on earth
Will stop, lies too and sorrow will have passed,
I'll still extol with all my poet's worth
The sixth part of the world, called briefly Rus.

1924

Translated by Olga Shartse

Letter to My Mother

And are you still alive, my mother?
Alive am I, and greetings send.
And may the tranquil light of evening
Upon your humble home descend.

They write me you are anxious, mother,
Consumed with longing for your absent son,
Are seen too often in your faded jacket
Waiting by the roadside when your work is done.

And when you sit alone in twilight,
A horrifying vision makes you start:
You see me brawling drunken in a tavern
And someone stick a knife into my heart.

Take comfort, mother; that is only
The foolish fancy of a troubled brain.
Not such a drunkard I, nor such a monster,
To die without embracing you again.

I love you tenderly as ever.
My only hope, my one desire
Is to find at last a longed-for harbour
Beside your steady-burning fire.

I'll come when buds are bursting in the garden,
When in the orchard blossoms blow.
But mind you do not waken me at dawning
As you were wont to wake me long ago.

Do not awaken what is meant to slumber,
Do not evoke the ghosts of blighted dreams.
Too early did I suffer bitter losses,
And learn the worth of human schemes.

And do not try again to make me pious:
What's gone is gone—forever out of sight.
You alone are all my strength and gladness,
You alone—ineffable my light.

So be not anxious any longer, mother,
Nor waste your strength in longing for your son.
And go no longer in your faded jacket
Down to the roadside when your work is done.

1924

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

Letter to a Woman

You remember—
You must, of course, remember all:
How, in agitation, you paced the floor,
While I shrank against the wall,
Stung by reproaches
Flung into my face.

You said
It was high time we parted,
That you were sated,
Had drunk your fill;
That I was hard-hearted
And fated
To go on rolling downhill.

Beloved!
You did not love me.
Nor did you know that in this human welter
I was like a driven horse,
The lash above me
Swung by a reckless rider.

You did not know
Of my extremity.
In the fury of the storm besieging us,
My torment was—I could not see
Where fate was leading us.

A face is blurred
Seen eye to eye.
Contours emerge only at a distance.
When waves are surging mountain-high
A ship must battle for existence.

The world is a ship.
At last a steady hand
Has seized the helm and turned the bow
Hard into the waves, towards a new land
Whose silhouette is just emerging now.

Who has not, on that vast deck,
Pitched and fallen, cursed and risen?
Few indeed, when imminent seems the wreck,
Can keep their equilibrium.

And when our battered vessel rolled
On seas fanned high by heaven's bellows,
I hastened down into the hold
To shun the sight of my sea-sick fellows.

The hold—
Our ill-famed Russian pubs.
Within their walls I hoped to sink
Into oblivion, to forget life's rubs,
And drown despondency in drink.

Beloved!
I caused you pain.

I saw the light
Fade in your eyes, weary of forgiving.
Yet on I went, as if for spite,
Destroying myself in riotous living.

You did not know
Of my extremity.
In the fury of the storm besieging us,
My torment was—I could not see
Where fate was leading us.

.....

Long years have passed.
Now I can boast:
As you chose yours,
So I chose my lot.
Now at the festal board my toast:
Honour and glory to the pilot!

A flood of tenderness sweeps over me today.
With sorrow I recall the dumb
Anguish in your eyes, and haste to say:
That's what I was;
This—what I've become.
Beloved!
Your prophecy was wrong:
I did not stagger off the precipice.
Instead I joined the dedicated throng
Building the mighty Soviet edifice.
I am not he who once you knew,
And here declare, with risk of sounding trite:

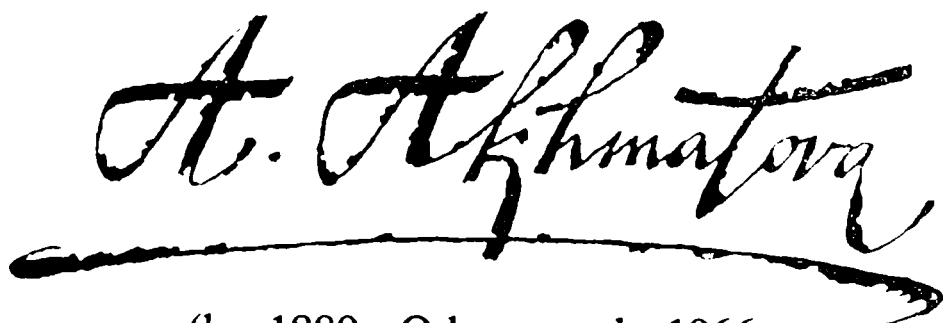
I'd follow freedom's banner to
The ends of earth—or at least the Isle of Wight.
Forgive me.
You too are changed, my love,
And to a sober husband wedded.
Well rid are you of me, and of
The prospect of a life you dreaded.
Live, then, as destined by your star,
In sheltered groves,

Blessed by the world's opinion.
Accept these greetings from afar—
Ever your friend,

Sergei Yesenin.

1924

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

A large, elegant handwritten signature in black ink, reading "A. Akhmatova". The signature is written in a cursive style with long, flowing lines. Below the signature is a thick, dark horizontal line that tapers at both ends.

(b. 1889, Odessa—d. 1966,
Moscow)

It would be no exaggeration to say that Anna Akhmatova was one of the great poets—and certainly the greatest poetess—in the history of Russian literature, a literature which we all know is not lacking in great poets.

*In the course of her long life and career she faced difficulties and tragic bereavement and her literary achievements were of great stature. Paradoxically, her first volume of verse, **EVENING**, which appeared in 1912 when she was only 23 years of age, largely featured motifs of loneliness and wasting away, while the last volume to be published in her lifetime, **THE COURSE OF TIME**, which appeared in 1965 when she was already 76, was remarkable for its freshness of feeling and the vigorous quality of its thought, full of youthful vitality and mature wisdom.*

A woman of classic grace and beauty, she proved to be a much deeper thinker and braver citizen than the delicate intimacy of her first poems would have led one to believe.

When her country was facing hard times—at the start of the revolution in 1917 and upon the outbreak of war in 1941—the poetess, who was seemingly engrossed in utterly personal and intimate emotions, showed herself to be a true patriot, a public-spirited citizen.

A brilliant master of the poetic craft, an impeccable stylist and a creative artist always extremely demanding of herself, Anna Akhmatova left a heritage of poetry which has received universal recognition. Her poems have been translated wherever true poetry is highly esteemed. She was awarded the Etna-Taormina Poetry Prize in Italy in 1964 and one year later she was made an honorary D. Litt. of Oxford University.

In the history of Soviet Russian poetry she figures as an inspired writer who turned her thoughts and feelings into sublime poetry.

When in a suicidal anguish
Our land awaited German guests
And from the Church of Russia vanished
The zeal Byzantium possessed,

When by the Neva our prime city,
Her pride forgotten, stood perplexed
And—like a drunken whore none pity—
Did not know who would take her next,

I heard a voice. With soothing summons
“Come hither, hither!” it implored.
“Your birthplace leave! Leave sinful Russia
Forever! Come away abroad!

“Snow-white your blood-red hands I’ll render,
I’ll rid your heart of darkest shame,
The pain of outrage and surrender
I’ll comfort with another name!”

But unconcerned and calmly raising
My open palms I blocked my ears,
Not letting such unseemly phrases
Profane my soul in grief and tears.

1917

Translated by Peter Tempest

* * *

I’m not one of those abdicators
Who left their land for foes to wrong.
I pay no heed to adulators,
To them I shall not cede my song.

But for the exile, as for ailing
Or jailed folk, always have I bled.
Deep shadows are your lone path veiling
And ever sour is alien bread.

We here though, braving fires that carried
What youth we still enjoyed away,
Never avoided, never parried
A single blow that came our way.

We know—in all men's eyes tomorrow
Each hour shall vindicated be...
For none can match our tearless sorrow,
Proud bearing and simplicity.

July 1922

Translated by Peter Temp

* * *

It's delightful here: vibrant the air,
Crisp the snow, daily keener the frost.
On a flaming white bush over there
Frozen roses are gracefully tossed.
These majestic expanses of snow
Bear a twin track where skis have gone by,
A reminder that ages ago
Here together we passed, you and I.

1922

Translated by Peter Temp

The Muse

When in the night hour I await her coming
It seems to me my life hangs by a thread.
Youth, honours, liberty all shrink to nothing
When my dear visitor pipes by my bed.
Look, here she comes. Her veil she raises, turning
To view me with a shrewd appraising eye.
“Pray, was it you dictated the Inferno
To Dante?” And she answers: “It was I.”

1924

Translated by Peter Temp

The First Shelling of Leningrad

In streets as busy as before
A sudden change I found,
For this was not a city roar
Nor yet a country sound.
A distant rumble shook the whole
Of heaven—like a thunder-roll,
Except that in the thunder's train
Comes moisture from a lowering cloud
To slake the thirst of soil fresh-ploughed
And joyous heavy rain.
This was a sound as dry as hell,
It made my baffled ears rebel
Against the thought such clamour wild
Might, with its hot crescendo breath
Indifferently dealing death,
Destroy my little child.

September 1941

Translated by Peter Tempest

Courage

We know that our fate in the balance is cast
And we are the history makers.
The hour for courage has sounded at last
And courage shall never forsake us.
We do not fear death where the wild bullets screech,
Nor weep over homes that are gutted,
For we shall preserve you, our own Russian speech,
The glorious language of Russia!
Your free and pure utterance we shall convey
To new generations, unshackled you'll stay
Forever!

February 1942

Translated by Peter Tempest

B. Pasternak

(b. 1890, Moscow—d. 1960,
Peredelkino, near Moscow)

The son of an academician of painting and brought up in an aesthetically sophisticated milieu, Boris Pasternak was already able to make music and draw in childhood, so that he could easily have set out to be a professional artist or musician. During his student years, he was so seriously involved in philosophy that he seemed about to become a star of the scholarly world.

He became a poet, however, and in his poetry he combined philosophy, music and painting in one. His first book was A TWIN IN CLOUDS (1914), and his second, MY SISTER LIFE (1917). In these works, what makes Pasternak's verse unlike that of any other poet had already emerged. He is subjective, but strives to present his emotions as part of the universe itself. He has inherited the best traditions of 19th-century philosophical lyric verse, but has broken with external descriptiveness of style, transforming his works at times into fabric of highly complex

associations. He welcomes the stormy changes in the world, but his revolutionary feeling shows less in the direct handling of the theme of revolution than in the accelerated rhythms of the poems and in the disruption of the established poetic canons. It is entirely logical that a poet of such intense moral feeling as Boris Pasternak should have eventually decided to reproduce, through the medium of poetry, the inner world of one of the Russian revolution's morally purest heroes, Lieutenant Nikolai Shmidt of the Navy. During the 1905 revolution, this officer, carried by the uprising of the Black Sea sailors on to the very crest of the elemental wave, decided to go with the sailors to the bitter end when other officers betrayed them. He courageously faced execution, laying down his life "for his friends", when the uprising was brutally suppressed by tsarism.

The dialectics of his inner life consistently led Boris Pasternak to a constant deepening of his poetic thought, to a striving to "get to the essence" in everything, and at the same time towards the democratisation of verse, to a sublime simplicity of form. Boris Pasternak's poetry is a significant landmark in world poetry.

Engaged in translating works by the world's leading poets, and master of many languages, he not surprisingly himself became one of the great translators. Pasternak's prose, unfortunately, does not bear comparison with the heights reached

*by his poetry. Thinker, master of
verse in the way that an artist is
master of colour or a composer is
master of sounds, Boris Pasternak
was born for poetry.*

Nineteen Hundred and Five

(An excerpt)

Winter has wandered since October
Into the ugliness of our prose,
And, like curtains befringed with tassels,
Steadily earthwards sink the skies.

Still confused is the virgin snow-path,
Awesome as tidings brought from afar.
In these days' unearthly novelty,
Revolution, is all that you are.

Joan of Arc from Siberian dungeons,
Convict and leader, you and your breed
Threw yourselves down the well of life's problems,
Too impetuous to match your speed.

You, a socialist, from the shadows,
As from a pile of flints, struck fire.
And you sobbed when you glowed upon us,
Turned us to ice with your basilisk stare.

And, distraught at the thunder of cannon
Coming to life far off in the land,
You swing torches in alienation,
As if whirling the street in your hand.

In the snowflakes' drunken vagaries,
Still that gesture, proud and withdrawn;
Like a self-dissatisfied artist,
Celebration you shun and scorn.

Like a poet drained dry of ideas,
You seek solace in tramping around.
It's not moneybags only you flee;
All that's paltry sickens your mind.

1925-1926

Translated by Alex Miller

Winter's Night

Blizzards were blowing everywhere
Throughout the land.
A candle burned upon the table,
A candle burned.

As midges in the summer fly
Towards a flame,
The snowflakes from the yard swarmed to
The window-pane.

And, on the glass, bright snowy rings
And arrows formed.
A candle burned upon the table,
A candle burned.

And on the white illumined ceiling
Shadows were cast,
As arms and legs and destinies
Fatefully crossed.

Two slippers fell on to the floor
With a light sound,
And waxen tears dripped from the candle
On to a gown.

No object in the misty whiteness
Could be discerned.
A candle burned upon the table,
A candle burned.

A mild draught coming from the corner
Blew on the candle,
Seduction's heat raised two wings crosswise
As might an angel.

It snowed and snowed that February
All through the land.
A candle burned upon the table,
A candle burned.

1946

Translated by Alex Mil

In everything I seek to grasp
The fundamental:
 The daily choice, the daily task,
The sentimental.

To plumb the essence of the past,
The first foundations,
 The crux, the roots, the inmost hearts,
The explanations.

And, puzzling out the weave of fate,
Events' observer,
 To live, feel, love and meditate
And to discover.

Oh, if my skill did but suffice
After a fashion,
 In eight lines I'd anatomize
The parts of passion.

I'd write of sins, forbidden fruit,
Of chance-seized shadows;
 Of hasty flight and hot pursuit,
Of palms, of elbows.

Define its laws and origin
In terms judicial,
 Repeat the names it glories in,
And the initials.

I'd sinews strain my verse to shape
Like a trim garden:
 The limes should blossom down the nape,
A double cordon.

My verse should breathe the fresh-clipped hedge,
Roses and meadows
 And mint and new-mown hay and sedge,
The thunder's bellows.

As Chopin once in his études
Miraculously conjured
Parks, groves, graves and solitudes—
A living wonder.

The moment of achievement caught
Twixt sport and torment....
A singing bowstring shuddering taut,
A stubborn bow bent.

1956

Translated by Avril Pyman

* * *

It's unbecoming to be famous.
It isn't that that lifts aloft.
Maintaining archives tends to maim us.
Hoard MSS and you are lost.

The aim of art is self-discharge
And not the clap-trap of success.
It's shameless to be looming large
For merits which are but a guess.

Live on through life without imposture,
Live so as in the final end
To hear the love-call of the future,
Expanse and distance to befriend.

Hiatus—leave them in your fortune
But not by any means in papers.
Although the process be a torture,
Let whole chapters of life escape us.

And ducking down into obscurity,
Conceal your steps beneath its cloak.
So landscapes sometimes hide their purity
Beneath a veil of fog or smoke.

Though others will retrace in hot
Pursuit the imprints of your feet,
Remember: you yourself must not
Distinguish triumph from defeat.

Not even by the slightest fraction
Must you your proper self transcend.
Just be alive, in thought and action,
Alive and always to the end.

1956

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



(b. 1873, Moscow—d. 1924,
Moscow)

Russia has always been rich in exceptionally enlightened poets, but the personality of Valery Bryusov stands out even against this brilliant background. Gorky called him "the most cultured writer in Russia". Bryusov's life was a model of industry: he was poet, prose-writer, historian, scholar, dramatist, translator, critic and prosodist. He scaled all the summits in art thanks to his own gifts and his own independent efforts.

In 1899 he graduated from the historical-philological faculty of Moscow University. A little earlier he had published three verse collections, THE RUSSIAN SYMBOLISTS, for which he wrote most of the poems himself under various pseudonyms to create the impression of a thriving literary school. The stratagem worked. It was the beginning of the symbolist movement in Russia.

In successive volumes external effects gradually came to be of less importance than his growing urge to find new forms of poetry that

could adequately reflect what people felt in the new 20th century.

His verse acquired the three-dimensional quality of sculpture; careful composition was blended with strict precision of imagery.... Intense reflections on the destiny of society led Bryusov to forecast that the world of the future would be shaken by violent convulsions.

As leader of an avant-garde trend in literature and editor of the magazine VESY, the literary hub of modernism, Bryusov nevertheless drifted away from the "young symbolists" who avoided portraying the contradictions of reality.

Bryusov's evolution was complex in that, though he grew convinced of the need to "smash" the old world, he could not conceive of any way of creating the new one until the revolution of 1917.

He accepted the October revolution without hesitation. His active social and cultural work after the revolution evoked general admiration: he worked in the field of education and publishing, he gave lectures and organised the Higher Literary Institute in 1921. He was mentor to young poets, published studies of prosody, and, above all, maintained a steady output of verse.

As a poet who was encyclopedist, worker and thinker, Valery Bryusov earned himself an honourable place in Soviet literature.

Work

To work is a joy so inspiring
At table or bench or in field,
To work to the point of perspiring,
To work without stint, never tiring,
With stubborn persistency steeled!

Keep ploughing the straightest of courses,
Judge truly the sweep of your scythes
And stoop to the girths of your horses
Until on the meadow-grass gorgeous
Night dewdrops, like jewels, arise!

In towns in the din never-ending
Of tools on the factory floor
Go fill with a spirit unbending
Your day—yes, the millionth, spending
At work like the days gone before!

Or over your manuscript poring
Set down what your heart shall dictate;
Who cares if a star heralds morning?
Devote the whole night to recording
The thoughts that for you carry weight!

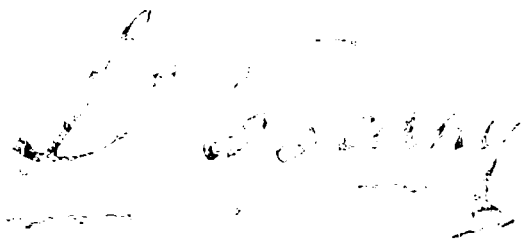
The corn that you grow shall be taken
All over the world; from each bench
A life-giving torrent shall hasten,
The thought that is printed awaken
The conscience of millions of men.

To work then! A crop rich and stable
From work, as from seed, surely springs.
To see beyond—no one is able,
But like dew from heaven all labour
To people some benefit brings.

Great pleasure from work we're deriving
At table or bench or in field!
So work to the point of perspiring,
Go work without stint, never tiring,
In toil shall earth's joy be revealed!

August 1917

Translated by Peter Tempest



(b. 1883, village of Gubovka
near Kherson—d. 1945,
Moscow)

Demyan Bedny was born into the family of a poor peasant, studied at the village school and then at an army medical school and, on qualifying, served in the army as a doctor's assistant. During the revolution and the Civil War years, he became one of the most popular poets in Russia. His fables, poems and verse skits and pamphlets inspired by current events found a wide response among the people. Editions of his works outnumbered those of all the other Russian poets taken together. His lyrics were sung to music everywhere, his fables were immediately learnt by heart, and lines from his pamphlets were quoted everywhere as popular sayings.

From the verse, emerges the image of an agitator-poet, openly embracing the task of introducing the masses to revolutionary reality.

The poetry of Demyan Bedny provides a key to an understanding of the extent of the popular participation in the accomplishment of the October Revolution.

I Serve No Muse

I sing—or can I say “I sing”
When harsh my voice and harsh the word I bring?
No sweet-sung, silv’ry note
Can rise from battle-hardened throat;
And not for me the crowd’s polite ovation
That comes to him who bows from bright-lit stage.
In condemnation
I raise my voice, the raucous voice of burning rage,
’Gainst those who serve the dynasty of evil. I accuse!
I serve no Muse,
But only you, my fellow-men oppressed.
My verses speak your own rough, tongue. My task
Is not to soothe, but scourge, denounce, unmask.
Yours is the righteous wrath that fills my breast,
Yours are the hopes and fears to be expressed,
And yours alone the praise or blame I ask.

1917

Translated by Archie Johnstone

The Seeing-off

(A Red Army Song)

As my Momma saw me off
At the station
All my relatives began
Lamentations.

“Oh, where do you go, my lad,
Where you goin’?
In the Army it’s too bad,
Stay at home!

There’re so many lads who stay,
What about you?

Bolsheviks can very well
Do without you!

Better hurry up and dump
Your enlistment.
How can you be so damned
Optimistic!

Look, your mother grieves for you,
Going crazy,
There is so much needs to do
Don't be lazy!

See, how things are gettin' on—
Sheer pleasure!—
How much land we now received
In possession!

And the life is goin' on
Like it oughta,
Better stay and marry your
Neighbour's daughter.

You could lead a happy life
Quiet and homely..."
Here I bade a hearty bow
To my Momma.

To the gentlemen I bowed,
To the ladies.
"Don't you holler over me
You, cry-babies.

If all were the dolts you are
At such an hour
Bloody tzars would set anew
Their power.

The oppressors would restore
Their kingdom.
Nothing will remain of your
Land and freedom.

Fierce landowners would come back
And their soldiers,
And a yoke would put on you
Worse than th' old one.

Don't you think I'm going to
Merry-makin'
When my mother to your care
I'm forsakin'.

The Red Army glorious march's
Worth the trouble.
And I gonna do away
With rich rabble.

I won't enter on too long
Conversations,
But just stick my knife in fat
Corporations!

Won't surrender? Go to your
Holy Peter!
As a trophy, paradise
Will be sweeter.

Not your drunken paradise
Of landowners,
But the best of Holy Lands—
—Land of Soviets!"

1918

Translated by Galina Hamper

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'V. Khlebnikov'. The signature is written in a cursive, calligraphic style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

(b. 1885 near Astrakhan—d. 1922, the village of Santalovo, near Novgorod)

Khlebnikov was called Victor at birth, but he changed this Latin name to a Slavonic one, Velimir—one who masters the world. A minor detail, but very typical of Khlebnikov, who thought of himself as a reformer of language and a kind of poetic Messiah, called upon to change the world.

Khlebnikov died young and his output was not large, but his impact on Russian poetry has proved very considerable. There are several reasons for this.

First and foremost, he was a sincere and unselfish knight-errant of poetry, professing “non-mundane” freedom, that is, total freedom as a poet from the conditions of daily life, from property ownership.

He was, moreover, a man of profound humanist and democratic ideas. He dreamed of the worldwide brotherhood of men. He saw the revolution as an act of revenge against tyrants who had oppressed

working people for thousands of years.

Furthermore, Khlebnikov's attempts to reform Russian poetry and to transform the very foundations of prosody were bound to attract poets during a period of massive historical disruption.

Although Khlebnikov by the very nature of things failed to invent a universal human language and overthrow the fundamental principles of poetic portrayal of the world, his kindness, his feeling of kinship with nature and the spirit of his innovative quests justify calling Velimir Khlebnikov a splendid pioneer of modern poetry whose work still awaits further study in depth.

To the Youth League

You young Russian lads, who like lions
For three years protected the People's Hive,
Your deeds I have long been admiring,
Your filling on work fronts many a breach,
Your speeding to where
A lion-chest bare
Was your only defence when bullets would screech.
Everywhere bold and cheery,
Resting on guns your weary blond heads,
You went after hunger and cold,
Forgot the existence of pillows and beds.
You young lions were like the sailor
Who under a savage barrage of fire
Was quick to notice steam escaping
From the boiler with consequences dire
So, lacking an iron plug, with his whole
Elbow boldly he plugged the hole.
His arm is stinging, his arm is smoking,
The roast smell the sea breeze wafts is fresh—
The rare roast smell of human flesh.
But the steam was beaten, his body won:
To waste the hot steam could not run,
The warship was able to fire her gun.
To you young folk who've often shouted
"Be off!" to the world's grey preying owl,
This is my counsel:
Leap on the shoulders of the old generation boldly.
Everything they have achieved is a step or two only.
More from up there shall meet your gaze!
You'll see very far
With eyes less scarred
Than ours by the whiplash of many days.

1921

Translated by Peter Tempest



(b. 1895, Odessa—d. 1934,
Moscow)

A romantic in real life, Eduard Bagritsky was a romantic in his poetry too. He began appearing in print when he was twenty, so that the first revolutionary years coincided with his first published poetry. During the Civil War, Bagritsky served as a soldier in a special partisan detachment; he took part in the bitter fighting and wrote poems and leaflets. After the war, he contributed to the satirical magazines and made public appearances.

Bagritsky's outlook on life matured rapidly. In 1926, he was already writing his tragic epic, THE BALLAD OF OPANAS, a long poem about the fate of a peasant who wants to stand aside from the struggle of the social worlds, but finds himself in the camp of the revolution's enemies and is doomed to perish.

The new era was both heroic and tragic. The ordinary man who found himself at the crossways was described with sympathy, pain and irony by Eduard Bagritsky, a poet whose contribution to Soviet Russian poetry cannot be overestimated.

Death of a Young Pioneer

*The leaves, refreshed, are trembling,
They bid the storm farewell;
The chiff-chaff's tuneful warbling
Is heard in wood and dell.*

Valya.... Valentina,
Is it day or night?
In the room you lie in
Everything is white.

Someone's kindly fingers
Gently stroke your head.
Valya.... Valentina,
Why are you in bed?

On your cheeks the deadly,
On your cheeks the slow
Flames of scarlet fever
Dark as embers glow.
There's a mist before you,
You are limp and weak.
Strangled moans escape you,
But you cannot speak.
Doctors crowd around you,
Voices rise and fall...
Will their witchcraft help you,
Will it help at all?
Parched and drooping grasses,
Flushed and lurid skies....
Swollen lips, and aching,
Heavy-lidded eyes.

Footsteps and a whisper.
(Sleep... Sleep... Sleep...)
Can you hear your mother
By the bedside weep?
"Valya, little daughter,
How you turn and toss.
I have brought your chain, dear,
And your golden cross.

Now you're down with fever,
Nothing's going right,
And the house and garden
Are a sorry sight.
It's a mess the barn is,
And the sty and shed,
And the cow and chickens.
Mostly go unfed.
Do your ma a favour,
It's for you I fear,
Wear your cross, my darling,
It won't hurt you, dear."

Down her cheek, unheeded,
Steals a lonely tear....
There's a rainstorm brewing,
It is drawing near.
From the roaring ocean,
In a leaden chain,
Clouds are creeping, heavy
With torrential rain.

Valya's eyelids flutter,
And she stirs and sighs....

...Pioneers are marching
Straight across the skies.
Is it lightning flaring
Or their crimson ties?

To the thunder's drum,
Holding hands they come.

Pushing through the pearly
Storm-clouds, on they go.
She can see their faces
Clearly from below.

High above the forest,
High above the wall
And the silent garden
Of the hospital,

With a blare of bugles
Comes the cheery crew,
Ranks of youthful fighters
In their shirts of blue.

More, and more, and more....
Hundreds of them pour
From the left and right,
Blotting out the light:
Pioneers of Kuntsevo
And of Setun too,
Pioneers of Moscow,
All in shirts of blue.

By the bed the mother
Dumbly sits and sqays.
What is it she seeks for
In her daughter's gaze?...

Valya's lips are burning,
She is short of breath.
Kisses cannot save her
From the grip of death.

"Worked I have and sweated,
Drudged I have and slaved,
Never slept or rested,
Only scrimped and saved,
Just to fill the coffer
And the wedding chest
Full of cloth and linen,
Dresses and the rest,
Just to see you, child,
To the altar led
With a bridal veil
On your pretty head.
Dear one, don't you make me
Beg and beg in vain.
Do your ma a favour,
Wear your cross and chain."

What a dull and irksome
And unloved refrain....
Youth is life and vigour,
Youth cannot be slain!

On campaigns it led us,
Once and twice and thrice,
And, intrepid, threw us
On the Kronstadt ice!

Sword in hand, we battled
On our fiery steeds.
Shot we were and slaughtered
In the squares and streets.

But our eyes we opened,
Caked with dirt and blood,
And together, rising,
Firm and fearless stood.

Mock at death and danger,
You, the brave and free.
In the flames of battle,
Courage, tempered be!

So that out of combat,
Out of blood and strife,
Like a song of summer,
Youth might spring to life,
So that in this tiny,
Fever-wasted frame,
It might surge, triumphing
Over death and pain.

Valya.... Valentina,
Can you lift your head?
There's a crimson banner
Floating overhead.

In the wind it flutters,
Bright and gay and warm.
"Pioneer, be ready!"
Roars the breaking storm.

Raindrops drum and patter,
Bold and resolute.
Valya's fingers slowly
Lift in a salute.

On the sickroom window
Rest her closing eyes.
"Ready! Ever ready!"
Hoarsely she replies.
Cheerfully the raindrops
Beat against the pane.

To the floor, forgotten,
Slip the cross and chain.
And the frail fingers
Weakly curve and drop,
While the rain comes lightly,
Swiftly to a stop.

As the skies abruptly
Clear and shed their gloom,
Warmth and dazzling sunlight
Burst into the room.

By the bed the mother
Broken-hearted kneels....

Robins fill the garden
With their gleeful peals.

That is all....

But no!
To the bugle's blow

Pioneers come marching,
Marching through the morn,
And a song,
A new one,
On their lips is born.

On and on it carries,
And its place it finds
In a world flung open
To admit the winds!

1932

Translated by Irina Zheleznova

A stylized, handwritten signature of N. Tikhonov in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

(b. 1896, St. Petersburg—d.
1979, Moscow)

The life of Nikolai Tikhonov is the history of the Soviet land and Soviet poetry. From 1918 to 1922, Tikhonov served in the Red Army. His poetry has been frequently published since 1920. The hero of his long poem SAMI is a little Hindu boy who has the exciting experience of discovering the world for himself through his joy in Lenin's genius, and Nikolai Tikhonov carried this feeling of internationalism with him all through his life. A participant in the Civil and Great Patriotic wars, Hero of Socialist Labour and Lenin Prize winner, chairman of the Soviet Peace Committee, Tikhonov's main message was feeling of the fraternity of peoples all over the world.

A singer of the romantic exploit, Nikolai Tikhonov became famous as the author of ballads dedicated to heroes of the Civil and Great Patriotic wars. During the worst days of the Leningrad blockade, Nikolai Tikhonov, while in the besieged city, wrote the poem, KIROV IS WITH US (1941). An austere and

manly mood is combined with symbolism at a high level: we see the image of the legendary Bolshevik Kirov, whose name is inseparable from the development of Leningrad in the 20s and 30s into a giant of industry and science. The image of Kirov personified the finest spiritual qualities of Leningrad's people who, as the poet foretold, would help them to resist under the appalling conditions of the blockade and to win through in the end. The poet was right! The citizens of Leningrad broke a 900-day blockade of unparalleled harshness and they won. The humane, life-affirming poetry of Nikolai Tikhonov joined them in celebrating the triumph over the forces of evil.

Festive, gay, possessed of crazy itches
And a Martian craving to create,
I observe a heaven starved of riches
But an earth that's worthy of debate.

Worthy to become a blood relation,
Mixing fire divine again with clay,
Making every simple aspiration
Sparkle with inimitable day.

That's the way I live, but if I weary
Of this life and for a soft grave sigh,
Skyward my gaze turning, dim and bleary,
I shall call hell's lawyers to my side—

Let them search the grim-faced laws and duly
On each binding clause their finger put
Which along earth's highway my unruly
Horde of days has trampled underfoot.

1920

Translated by Peter Tempest

Perekop

Diamond on diamond, it's hailing stars,
The wind is still in the cypress trees,
A rifle, a knap-sack, a gas-mask, and
A pound of bread shared by three.

A delicate lace of palest blue
Has enveloped the vineyards—and
For four years now we've not slept o' nights,
And hunger has gnawed us, the fire, and smoke;
But the soldier obeys the command.

And trap after trap
For the red wolves was set,
The bayonet's full-gorged, the butt has snapped,
The lasso whistles over our necks.

For the sea, for the hills, for the stars we fight.
Each tentative step has been bought with our bones.
The winged wolf-hounds have leaped from the heights,
The Sivash is paved with living stones.

But the dead, before they drop in their tracks
Advance by one more stride.
Nor bullet, nor hand-grenade have power
To turn the human tide.

There are children, blind and lame, in our rear,
Children of a long slaughter—
There are towns in our rear on shattered roads
Without bread, without hearth, without water.
And beyond the mountain is rest and joy,
A mirage?—it matters not.
With a sound like a storm goes up the cry
“We'll win!” from a thousand throats.

When the moon rolled down behind the clouds
Like a silver fish's eye,
Over us and our knotted, red bayonets
The sun climbed into the sky.

The dolphins were playing afar
And sea-gulls were rocking in space,
And the long grey ships were changing course
To head for the Bosphorus.

And we lay down under the trees,
Under the rocks, in the grass,
And waited—the first time in four long years—
For sleep to come at last.

We dreamt—if we lived for a hundred years,
We'd not see the like again.
No songs can be made up about it, no words
Are there to describe it all.

1922

Translated by Avril Pyman

Kirov Is with Us

1

The blacked-out houses, stern giants,
Display a grim semblance of sleep.
An iron blockade-time silence
The nights over Leningrad keep.
But the silence is torn by sirens
And back to our posts we return.
Above the Neva bombs whistle
And falling, on bridges burn.
The air-raid's intensity heightens.
Shellbursts and bomb-blasts shine bright.
Through the siege-ravaged city goes Kirov
In Leningrad's iron nights.
He goes in an army trenchcoat,
As if at the regiments' head,
His stride as unflinching as ever,
In the thick of the battle he treads.
A star on his army cap reddens;
Alert, he goes on, fiery-eyed,
For Leningrad's fearless defenders
Filled with compassion and pride.

2

A sentinel stands near the water,
A seaman of Leningrad's guard.
Kirov looks at the handsome young features
With heartfelt, paternal regard.

And Kirov remembers his comrades,
The Caspian's trustworthy shield,
Who fought on the banks of the Volga,
Among the dry Astrakhan fields.
He sees in this supple young sailor
The same manful beauty, the same
Tenacity, vigour and valour
Revived in these youngsters again,
And snatched from the dusk by a searchlight,
The sailor cap blazoned with fame,
And on its black ribbon, like lightning,
Gleams Kirov's victorious name.

3

Black ruins remain of the buildings
After a bomb alights.
Quiet, through the city goes Kirov
In Leningrad's iron nights.
A fighter for truth and justice,
Through the city he goes with firm strides.
In the darkness, silent and frosty,
Like fortresses, factories rise.
Sweat shines on the workers' temples;
One care in the world do they know—
Their work must not be interrupted,
Whether they're tired or no.
Though shellfire, blazing like hellfire,
Not once in their workshops bursts forth,
Fear and fatigue discarding,
They work for all they are worth.
Tired, people stand still for a moment,
And then an old worker steps out;
They listen, while Grandad's speaking,
A stranger to terror and doubt.
"Our soup may be watery, buddies,
Our bread worth its weight in gold,
Yet we've got to be firm as iron
Ignoring both tiredness and cold.
The foes couldn't smash us with weapons;
To crush us with hunger's their stake—
To seize our city from Russia,

Its citizens captive to take.
Yet never will such a thing happen
On the banks of the sacred Neva:
We'll die, but we'll never surrender,
For Russia's true children we are.
With arms that we give them, our soldiers
Will break through the siege; not in vain
Our factory, sombre and warlike,
Bears Kirov's heroic name.

4

Quiet, through the city goes Kirov,
In Leningrad's iron nights.
His heart fills with pride as he watches
His valorous countrymen fight,
Pride for Leningrad workers
Staunchly defending their land.
Nearer and nearer flares gunfire,
Nearer and nearer shells land.
A bomb drops nearby—round the corner—
And a house falls, with smoke embraced.
To offer assistance to soldiers
A brave little nurse makes haste,
To rescue them, buried in rubble,
Her life she'd lay down without fear,
Though walls topple down all around her,
Though bricks hurtle past, at her ear.
So young, yet such martial prowess
She shows, and such pride she excites
In Kirov, who goes like a soldier
Through Leningrad's iron nights.

5

In the snowclad Caucasian foothills,
In the underground Kirov you'd see;
A herald of Soviet power,
A tribune, a fighter was he.
He remembers the bloody and fearful,
Fire-gutted Astrakhan days,

The nights in the steppes when the sabres
 Would flash in the battle-blaze.
 Firm as iron, yet tender-hearted,
 He travelled by numberless roads,
 Through Russia's boundless expanses,
 Fought in battles, faced dangers and woes.
 Yet our Leningrad, worker-city,
 With all his Bolshevist soul
 He loved for its courage and beauty—
 His last love, the deepest of all.
 ...But then one dark day in December
 He met a disastrous end.
 All Leningrad bade him farewell then,
 Their father, leader and friend.
 And yet he still lives among us:
 In battle and work he takes part.
 As soon as we think of Kirov,
 New fortitude fills our hearts.

6

Trenches, barricades, tank-pits
 Everywhere catch his sight.
 To the suburbs Kirov goes quietly
 In Leningrad's iron nights.
 He watches the battleflares soaring,
 Conflagrations that never cease,
 The red glow of midnight campfires
 Kindled by Nazi beasts.
 In the distance Tommy-guns rattle,
 Shots like knifeblades stab at the land.
 With dimly glistening armour
 Tanks out of action stand.
 The enemy storms and rages,
 Your city he longs to seize.
 He'd stuff himself with your mincepies,
 To your daughters he'd do as he'd please.
 Ferocious, hung over with weapons,
 And furs which he grabbed from your wives
 He comes from the trampled ploughfields
 After your hearths and your lives.

But barring the enemy's onslaught,
Our people arises in force.
Gripping hand-grenades, go old fighters
To fight with the bestial hordes.
And tank after tank into battle
Through snow-covered ploughfields rolls;
"Kirov" looms large on one turret,
"Save our country!" another calls.

7

In the cannonfire's thunder and fury
With the Nazi rabble to fight
March Leningrad's valorous people
Through Leningrad's iron nights.
The banner of victory flutters,
Red as the rising sun,
And Kirov's name, awe-inspiring,
Leads Leningrad regiments on!

November 1941

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

M. Svetlov

(b. 1903, Ekaterinoslav,
now Dnepropetrovsk—d.
1964, Moscow)

Lenin Prize winner Mikhail Svetlov made a unique impression on Russian Soviet poetry owing to the paradoxical qualities of his talent, his ability to be at the same time serious, and ironical, solemn and down-to-earth, romantically elevated and strictly mundane.

At sixteen, he joined the Komsomol organisation. At 17, he volunteered for the Red Army and, as a young man, saw so much that was distressing in life that he felt an urgent need to balance it all with good-natured humour and a calm, cheerful outlook on things, seeing the commonplace in greatness, and the unusual, the romantic and the sublime in the commonplace.

This citizen-poet's strength of feeling, his wisdom and his internationalist message found powerful expression in the immortal poem, GRANADA, one of several poems by him which were set to music and became famous as popular songs.

Granada

We charged at the enemy,
Camped on the heath,
With *The Song of the Apple*
Caught in our teeth.
The rocks and the heather,
The newly-mown hay
Echo our song
To this very day.

But my pal sang another,
A song from afar,
As we rode in the saddle,
Pursuing our star.
He gazed at his homeland,
And dreamy his tone:
“Granada, Granada,
Granada, my own.”

He sang it with feeling,
My pal from Ukraine,
Now why should he feel
Such devotion to Spain?
Can Kiev or can Kharkov
Explain the lad's song?
Have Ukrainians been singing
In Spanish for long?

Tell me, Ukraine,
Is it not in this rye,
That the bones of Shevchenko,
The patriot, lie?
Why, pal, do you always
Sing when alone:
“Granada, Granada,
Granada, my own”?

The answer came slowly,
And shy was his look:

"It's this way: Granada
I found in a book.
Somehow I liked it,
A damned pretty name.
In Spain there's a province
That's called by the same.

I went off to fight
With a gun and a pack
So the poor in Granada
Could get the land back.
Farewell to my family!
Farewell to my home!
Granada, Granada,
Granada, my own!"

We yearned, as we galloped,
To master at once
The grammar of battle,
The language of guns.
The sun rose above us,
Descended again,
Our horses grew weary
Of pounding the plain.

The Song of the Apple
Adapted its rhymes
To the rhythm of riding,
The woe of the times.
And where is your song, pal?
Listen... a moan?
"Granada, Granada,
Granada, my own."

There he lay wounded,
Prone on the ground,
The first of our men
That a bullet found.
Full on his face
Fell the light of a star,
His pale lips murmured:
"Granada... Graná..."

Now he is one
Of the shadowy throng
In the Vale of Mists,
Where he sings his song.
We hardly noticed
The loss of a man;
The Song of the Apple
At daybreak began.
But softly, at nightfall,
The gentle rain
Mourned the Ukrainian
Fallen for Spain.

The song is forgotten,
The singer unknown:
"Granada, Granada,
Granada, my own."
New songs are borne
On the turbulent air,
Saying you mustn't,
You mustn't despair!
Ne náhda,¹ ne náhda,
Ne náhda despair
For Granada, Granada,
Granada, the fair!

1926

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

Immortality

Romantic youngsters, drunk with dreams of triumph,
They've pedalled off to continents unknown,
Two angels on two bicycles fast-flying—
My love and youth, and left me all alone.

¹ You needn't (Russ.).— *Tr.*

I start to recapitulate their route
With here a punctured tyre and there a fall...
But steady! Here's a steep ascent—the date
That made me member of the Komsomol.

Nay, when I sally forth towards the future
I won't discard the past as a thing outworn.
What? Life's a river? No, it's all a-quiver
With contradiction, whose main purpose is to warn:

For the generation—not for numeration
Hoard up your minutes as you'd hoard up gold.
But don't convert the sterling of your talent
To jungling coin that soon grows stale and cold.

Don't pay your country back with petty pence,
Don't be a nuisance to her on her course.
And then, when you are past life's barbed wire
fence,
A poet's immortality is yours.

Don't fear old age. What's greying hair? Mere
trifles.
Plunge headlong in, cut straight across the whirl,
And death will come to you, no grisly idol,
But just a blushing sixteen-year-old girl.

What have you lived for? What have you created?
You can't recall? And yet you haven't lived in
vain,
For he who buries you will call you to the rescue—
You and your poetry—again and yet again.

Although no kinsmen, your two spirits are akin.
Such bonds as these survive the grimmest death.
And therefore you must go through thick and thin
And live, live on while able to draw breath.

Yes, greeting the new day with kindly eye,
Cast off your numbness and, discarding fear,
Come out to meet your poetry, your time
Full speed, full steam ahead, in full career!

So, reassured once more, dispelling doubt,
I leave the dismal office of old man,
And once again the sweet wench Youth holds out
Her rosy cheek, which if I want to kiss, I can.

1957

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

In Hospital

What on earth is there to hope for or expect?
Every day they see me off and meet me.
They're surrounding me with honour and respect
Like a fish with onions, nice and neatly.

Are we really doomed to silent gloom,
Like an office left and closed at five?
Will men no longer hear my heart-beats boom,
Signalling that I am still alive?

Damn it, no! There's still some dawns ahead.
Though it looks my gumption's cooling off,
Yet that little boxer in my chest
Doubtless, still sounds militant enough!

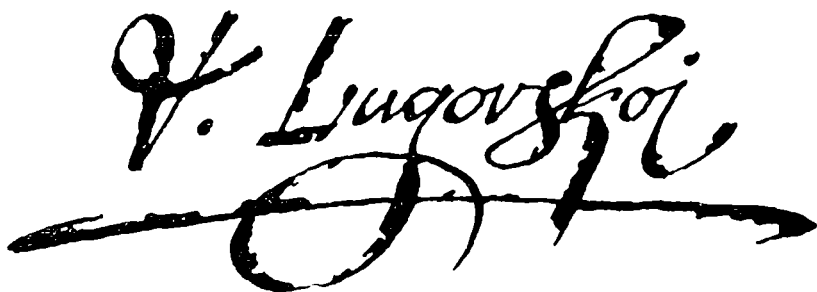
What is all this junk about farewell?
What mention can there be of alleluia
When with reddest wine my vessels swell?
Talk of death when life goes surging through you!

All my fire lives on in me unstifled
And the years command I have my say—
Soldiers march along with shouldered rifles,
Mothers bring their children out to play.

Let old warden Night be keeping vigil
Over me, this hospital, this gloom...
Come on, morning, quick—I'll make a gunhole
Of the window in my lonely room!

1964

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to read 'V. Lugovskoi' with a large, decorative flourish underneath that extends to the left and right.

(b. 1901, Moscow—d. 1957,
Yalta)

For all his individuality and uniqueness of style, there is a quality in Vladimir Lugovskoi's poetry that makes him probably one of the most typical Russian poets of the Soviet era. This is the ability to discern the heroic and universally human meaning in Soviet reality, for all that life was sometimes appallingly difficult for Soviet people.

Vladimir Lugovskoi was a teacher's son and served in the Red Army as a young man. He was twenty-five when his first verse collection came out entitled SPOLOKHI (the flickers of lightning that herald the approach of a storm). This title is indicative of the romantic nature of his works, dedicated to the Civil War.

The poet spent his whole life travelling: he visited Central Asia several times, sailed across foreign seas, journeyed through Central Europe and often went to Azerbaijan. Lugovskoi published several books notable for their profound lyrical-philosophical interpretation of

reality. The height of Lugovskoi's work is a book of long poems, THE MIDDLE OF THE CENTURY (1958), in which he associates and compares various times, events, characters and conflicts, adding up to a spacious, many-sided image of the epoch. In this complex unity, reminiscences of youth are prominent.

The Kremlin Cadets' New Year's Ball

No roll-call will sound till the morning,
The buglers won't play the "Fall in!"—
The Kremlin cadets till the dawning
Are dancing nineteen-nineteen in.

The oil lamps are flickering feebly,
The marble hall's gloomy and bleak;
The French horns, of distant halts telling,
Of first love inspiringly speak.

Deserted the galleries spacious—
There, only dark shadows now play,
Of lustres no longer resplendent,
Whose crystals ring cold as they sway.

The grey-haired commander in silence
Looks round and his eyes proudly flash—
"Hungarian Dance—choose your partners!
Those heels! Watch the floors—they will crash!"

Gay couples are twirling and soaring—
The boys, for the battle arrayed,
The girls—in their old faded blouses
And slippers all mended and frayed.

The bandsmen are merrily puffing
At trumpets of brass burnished bright.
'Twas spring when the last trams ceased running,
The streets are now depots of night.

The hall is so cold and depressing,
It's time from this dance to take rest,
To make that decisive confession,
For him to clasp her to his breast.

"Of what are you thinking, my darling?"
"The snow-sprinkled platform I see,
The troop-train awaiting the signal
To tear you at midnight from me."

Their pathway leads them ever forward—
Straight on to the South and the North;
Red Russia's in danger, in danger—
She calls her cadets to march forth.

The sweet smiling lips hold a promise
Of love that through winters will bloom;
The sorrow-free trumpets are singing,
The kettledrums boom in the gloom.

The gallery smells of December,
Of portraits and junk, of times fled;
But we—we will share and remember
Four ounces of prickly black bread.

The faded silk ribbons will vanish
Forever and aye from your sight—
Cadets, Red cadets of the Kremlin,
Come, welcome the year's farewell night.

And so, till the bugles are sounded,
Till belts and canteens are made fast,
“Hungarian Dance—swing your partners!”
Nineteen-nineteen's dawning at last!

1940

Translated by Louis Zellikoff

Introduction

to the Poem “The Middle of the Century”

I'm at the middle of the twentieth century.
I've seen a lot.
But much I did not see.
I missed so many things around and in me,
I failed to see them in my soul and in the world.
Still, try to understand, here's my confession:

I took a part in happenings tremendous
In human history.
What must I do,
Man from the ranks, an offspring of the age?
Speak of our times. Unique. Unprecedented.
Speak of the giant towering above the world
And on his mighty shoulders hoisting
The burden of the planet's life and fate.
How singular is life!
In people's minds
Whole worlds go toppling, countries perish,
And nations follow paths outlined for them
In men's nocturnal brooding thoughts,
And yet, you're just a drop of water in the ocean
Of history.
But then this history's in you.
You are in it. And you're answerable for it.
For everything—for victories, for glory,
For anguish, for mistakes,
 And for the men
Who led you.
For your flag, your emblem and your anthem.
I know I shrank from squarely facing things.
My weakness blinded me, my shyness dwarfed.
The vanity of living, the allure of earthly joys,
Of purely carnal warmth held me too fast.
But even if I'd had the keenest vision
There's very little that I could have seen
I stumbled, fell, got back on to my feet,
And carried on.
Alas, I am no prophet,
I'm just a poet who extols his times, his epoch,
That's packed to bursting point, alive and vital,
A time of great import for all the world of men.
My epoch, I belong to you with all my being,
I'm yours until my dying thought, all yours!
And I am proud that I was with you always,
With you, my time, whose motive forces were
The Revolution, Lenin, and the People.
I live by them. They live in me. We are as one.
And as I write these lines today I seem to hear
The voices and I seem to see the thoughts

I hear the crunch of footsteps of the snow outside.
A man is walking past. How vigorous his stride!
How young! How red his cheeks, how bright his eyes!
He seems to scorn the cold, his coat's so light.
He's carrying a rolled-up magazine.
Hello!
Hello, our youth. Hello, our future. Wait for me!
I'm here with you, I'm coming. See this book?
I hold it out to him.
Here, take it, it's for you.

Translated by Olga Shartse

The woman I had known
 does not exist.
She shares a smart apartment
 with her worthy husband,
He built a summer place for her,
 he's jealous of his bliss,
Her permed and tinted hair
 he loves to kiss.
I have no need of her address,
 I will not write
 or call her.

For, after all,

the woman I had known
does not exist.

And yet,

it all has been:

the angry, pounding surf,
That beat as hollowly and tautly
as an Eastern drum,
And rushed to lick the doorstep of that woman's
home.

She loved me,

violently,

fiercely then.

We'd be like wind

and sea,

she promised me again,

again.

It's true,

it all has been:

the angry, pounding surf,
The hillsides
with the prickly holly overrun,
The wind-borne rain
that poured a whole month long,
When under every raincloud,
blotting out the sun,
We met,
that woman and myself,
at every turn.

And it was beautiful.

Like light,

like ringing bells,

like song

We two were poor and young.

Of course, I understand.

We lived on stale old pies

which we thought tasted grand.

And if I'd told her then that I was soon to die

She would have moved both heaven and earth,

and hell

itself defie

1956

Translated by Olga Shartse

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M. Isakovsky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, horizontal flourish extending to the left and a large, decorative loop at the end.

(b. 1900, village of Glotovka
near Smolensk—d. 1973,
Moscow)

How did it come about that the song "Katyusha", written to a lyric by Mikhail Isakovsky, became an international partisan anthem? Why did a young girl's vow of faithfulness to her frontier-guard friend become, as it were, a password among the fighters against fascism? Perhaps the answer to this riddle is to be found in the deep-lying folk character of all Isakovsky's verse.

Born into a poor peasant family, he was unable to finish secondary school owing to lack of means. The October Revolution drew the young man into its orbit with irresistible force. In 1918, he joined the Bolshevik Party and worked as secretary of a district Soviet. At nineteen he became editor of the Yelnya town newspaper. His first poem had been published back in 1914. In the 20s one book of verse followed another. He wrote about what he knew well, "from the inside"—life in the Russian countryside. A man of the people,

Isakovsky became, as it were, their poetic singing voice.

His lyrics have been used for many popular songs which are sung to this day. Clarity and strength of feeling, sincerity of cadence, musicality of language, the combination of good-natured humour with the inflexible fortitude of spirit are the qualities that have made Isakovsky's lyrics true folk-songs.

Katyusha

Blossom graced the apple-trees and pear-trees,
Mist upon the river floated by.
Out Katyusha came to gather berries
On the clifftop rising steep and high.

There she walked and there she started singing
Of the dove-grey eagle of the steppe,
Of the one to whom her thoughts were winging,
Of the one whose letters she had kept.

Song of love, her maiden love declaring,
Chase the sun and speed without delay
Warmest greetings from Katyusha bearing
To the border guardsman faraway.

May the boy his village girl remember,
May he hear her song of tenderness,
May he guard his native land forever
And Katyusha guard her love no less.

Blossom filled the apple-trees and pear-trees,
Mist upon the river floated by.
Out Katyusha came to gather berries
On the clifftop rising steep and high.

1938

Translated by Peter Tempest

To the Russian Woman

Can mere words relate the story
Of what you went through in those years?
How tell of the labours heroic
You had to perform in the rear?

You saw off your brother, your husband,
You saw off the son you adored,
And the homefires you had to keep burning,
Alone, face to face, with the war.

Alone you remained with your heartache,
With wheat still unreaped in the field,
With countless men's jobs to be tackled,
Alone with your courage to steel.
All yours were the worries and grief,
With nowhere to seek relief.

Alone to do house and farm work,
And go without rest or sleep,
Alone to stand in for the menfolk,
Alone to sing songs or weep.

Of blue skies there was not a glimmer,
The thunder roared closer to home,
The news with each day sounded grimmer,
And, facing the ordeal alone,
The strong stuff of which you were made
You then to the whole world displayed.

Hiding your anguish and fears,
You struggled alone with the farming,
And the land which you watered with tears
Fed the whole of our valiant army.

The greatcoats to which you lent
The warmth of your loving hands
Were gratefully worn by the men
In the cold of our northern lands.

The soldiers went into battle
In the roar of a cannonade,
And enemy lines they shattered
With grenades which you, women, had made.

How bravely you took up the work
That women could hardly do,
There was not a duty you shirked,
No effort was too much for you.

The navvy you were, and the drover,
Alone you carried the brunt,
Yet you might have been living in clover
In the letters you wrote to the front.

Your menfolk received your good news,
And gladly shared it with others.
A white lie it was, they well knew,
But behind it was spirit and courage.

And into attack again
They went all the stronger and braver,
And whispered your name as men
Will whisper a pledge or a prayer.

1945

Translated by Olga Shartse

On High, Birds of Passage

On high, birds of passage are flying
To autumn horizons of blue
Down south to those lands over yonder
But I will be staying with you.
With you I'll be staying forever
The land of my birth is my home,
I don't need the bright shores of Turkey
Nor African by-roads to roam.

I've seen, you know, many a country
A soldier with rifle in hand,
And known not a sorrow as deep as
Time spent far from you, native land.
I've shared thoughts with many a comrade
When longing for Russia, and still
We've known not a duty more lofty
Than simply obeying your will.

I've struggled through swamps under fire
And shivered on snow-covered plains
But one single word, if you call me
I'd go through it all once again.
My hopes and my dreams I have wed to
Your future, your glorious goal,
One destiny, stern, bright and hopeful
One fate to be envied by all.

On high, birds of passage are flying
As summertime flees from their chase,
Down south to those lands over yonder
But I won't be taking their place.
But I will be staying forever
With you, land that gave me my birth.
I don't need the sun of another,
I need only my native earth.

1948

Translated by Laura Beraha

Prose

M. Gorky

(b. 1868, Nizhny Novgorod,
now Gorky—d. 1936, Moscow)

Maxim Gorky became a legend in his lifetime. It sometimes happens that nature bestows on the man power, strength of character and talent that was intended for a dozen outstanding people. Typical of such geniuses was Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, who wrote under the pseudonym of Maxim Gorky.*

Maxim Gorky never had a formal education, but he became one of the most learned men of his generation. In his early years he saw much suffering and cruelty, and he had to earn his living from the age of ten, serving as "boy" in a shop, dish-washer on a steamboat, baker's assistant, stevedore, chorister and so on. He worked in the fisheries on the Caspian seacoast, did jobs on railway stations and wandered about the country with tramps.

As a very young man, Gorky was involved in the revolutionary movement and soon became a Marxist. Gorky was repeatedly arrested, and he was even granted the

* Gorky means 'bitter one'.—Tr.

highest "honour" of all—to be imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. He devoted his whole life to making the lives of people happier on this earth insofar as it lay within his power and scope.

A tremendous impression was made on him by the personality of Lenin whom he met in 1905 and to whom he subsequently became bound by close ties of friendship.

In the 90s of last century, he published a brilliant cycle of romantic and colourful short stories about unusual people endowed with unusual feelings. Novel in form and content, they alone were enough to assure him a place in the history of Russian literature. As it happened, however, this was only his first step as an innovator. Maxim Gorky was undoubtedly the originator of what afterwards came to be known as socialist realism, inaugmenting a new era in the development of contemporary literature. Not only in theory, but in practice too, he showed with amazing power what the literature of the new world could attain.

He wrote dozens of books, *MOTHER*, *TALES OF ITALY*, *CHILDHOOD*, *MY APPRENTICESHIP*, *MY UNIVERSITIES*, *THE ARTAMONOVs*, *THE LIFE OF KLIM SAMGIN*, short stories, plays, publicism. All have become part of the world heritage, with a singificance that has not yet been fully appreciated.

Maxim Gorky's social and organisational work was on such a

scale as to be on a par with his creative achievements. While working indefatigably on his manuscripts, Gorky still found time to give invaluable help to hundreds of young writers. At the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 he delivered an extensive report of great theoretical significance. He became the first chairman of the newly-founded Union of Soviet Writers.

It was a great good fortune of Soviet literature that at its beginnings should have stood Maxim Gorky, a man of outstanding literary stature.

Childhood

(An excerpt)

At a very early date I realised that my grandfather had one God, my grandmother another.

In waking in the morning, grandmother would usually sit for a long time on the bed combing her amazing hair, jerking her head, clenching her teeth as she pulled out whole locks of the long black silk, and cursing under her breath so as not to wake me up:

“A pox on you, a plague on you, damn you!”

When she had managed to untangle it more or less, she would braid it and wash herself hurriedly, with angry spluttering. Without having washed the irritation from her large face, all wrinkled with sleep, she would kneel in front of the icons. Then would begin her true morning ablutions which left her completely refreshed.

Straightening her spine and throwing back her head, she would glance affectionately into the round face of the Mother of God and cross herself fervently as she whispered:

“Blessed Virgin, pour thy blessings on the coming day...”

Then she would bow to the very floor, raise herself slowly, and again whisper with growing fervour:

“Fount of all joy, the most pure beauty, like an apple tree in full bloom...”

Almost every morning she found new words of praise and adoration, and this made me listen to each of her prayers with strained attention.

“Dear heart, so pure, so divine! Guardian of my hearth, sun of heaven, so bright, so golden, precious mother of God, save us from the onrushings of evil, save us all from needless abuse, and me from being offended without cause...”

A smile hovered in the depths of her dark eyes, and she seemed to have become younger as she again crossed herself with a slow movement of her heavy hand.

“Dear Jesus, son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner, for thine own mother’s sake...”

Her prayers were always a laudatory offering, a paean of praise coming from a simple and sincere heart.

In the morning she did not linger long over her prayers: it was necessary to put up the samovar, since my

grandfather no longer kept a servant, and if she made him wait for his morning tea, she was rewarded by violent and endless reproaches.

Sometimes, awakening earlier than usual, he would climb up to the attic and find her at her prayers. He would stand listening silently, with a contemptuous smile at the corners of his thin, dark lips, remarking later at the breakfast table:

"How many times have I taught you how to pray, you thickhead, but on you go, in your stubborn way, muttering along like a heretic! How God ever puts up with it is more than I can understand!"

"He will understand," answered my grandmother confidently. "No matter what you say to Him, He's sure to understand."

"Crazy as a Chuvash, that's what you are! Phoo!"

Her God was with her all day long. She even told the animals about Him. I could see that all creatures—people, dogs, birds, bees, and even growing things—easily submitted to that God. He was equally kind and equally dear to everything on earth.

One day the mischievous tomcat belonging to the saloon-keeper's wife—a lovely, grey, golden eyed beast which was a favourite in the yard in spite of the fact that it was a toady and a sly glutton—caught a starling in the garden. My grandmother took the tortured bird away from the cat and said angrily:

"No fear of God in your heart, that's what's the trouble with you, you horrid beast!"

The janitor and the saloonkeeper's wife laughed at my grandmother for these words, but she shouted at them angrily:

"You think the animals have no knowledge of God? The least of them knows Him as well as you, you hardhearted creatures!"

While harnessing the fat, listless Sharap, she would murmur:

"Why so unhappy, servant of God? Getting old I guess..."

The horse would sigh and shake its head.

Yet she did not utter the name of God as often as did my grandfather. I could understand my grandmother's God and was not afraid of Him, yet I dared not lie in His presence. That would have been shameful. Because of this shame, I never lied to my grandmother. It was quite impossible to hide

anything from so kind a God, and so far as I can remember, I never had any inclination to do so.

One day the saloonkeeper's wife had a quarrel with my grandfather, and included my innocent grandmother in her vituperations, even throwing a carrot at her.

"And it's a fool you are, my fine lady!" retorted grandmother calmly. But I was deeply offended for grandmother's sake and decided to take revenge.

For some time I considered what would be the best way to injure this fat, redheaded woman with the double chin and no eyes to speak of.

In the internecine wars waged by our neighbours, I had observed that vengeance was wreaked by chopping off the tails of cats, poisoning dogs, killing chickens, or by stealing into the enemy's cellar at night and pouring kerosene into barrels of sauerkraut or pickles, or pulling the stoppers out of kegs of kvass. But none of these means satisfied me. It was necessary to think up something more awesome and terrible.

And so I decided on the following measure: when the saloonkeeper's wife climbed down into the cellar, I closed the hatch after her, locked it, did a dance of vengeance on top, and threw the key up on the roof. Then I rushed into the kitchen where my grandmother was cooking. At first she could not understand my ecstasy, but when she discovered its cause, she slapped me on the parts provided for that purpose, dragged me out into the yard, and sent me up on the roof for the key. Crushed by her reaction, I silently procured the key and then ran into a corner of the yard, from where I watched my grandmother free the prisoner and then come walking across the yard in the company of the hated one, both of them smiling amiably.

"I'll give it to you yet!" threatened the saloonkeeper's wife, shaking her fat fist at me, but her eyeless face was smiling good-naturedly. My grandmother took me by the scruff of the neck and led me into the kitchen.

"What did you do that for?" she asked.

"Didn't she throw a carrot at you?"

"Aha! So it was on my account you did it, eh? I'll show you, you little whipper-snapper! I'll shove you under the stove with the mice, and then you'll get some sense in you! A fine defender you make! Come, everybody, and take a look at this little bubble before it bursts! If your grandfather gets to

hear of it he'll take the skin off your behind. Get up to that attic and read your books!"

She did not speak to me for the rest of the day, but in the evening before saying her prayers, she sat down by the side of my bed and pronounced these unforgettable words:

"Listen, pigeon-widgeon, just remember this: never butt into the affairs of grownups. Grownups are a spoiled lot—tried by God. But you're not—not yet. So you just go on living according to your child lights, until the Lord sees fit to touch your heart and show you your task, leading you out onto the path you must trod. Is that clear? As for who's to blame for what—that's none of your business. God will judge and punish. That's for Him, not for us."

She was silent for a minute, during which she took some snuff, and then she narrowed her right eye and added:

"Sometimes, I think, the Lord Himself is hard put to tell who's to blame."

"Why, doesn't He know everything?" I asked in surprise.

"If He did," she replied sadly, "there's lots of things people wouldn't be a-doing. He sits up there in heaven, watching us down below, and sometimes he breaks into such tears, such sobbing! 'Ah, my people, my people, my own dear people!' he weeps. 'How my heart bleeds for you!'"

She herself was weeping and, without drying her tears, went to the icon corner to pray.

From that time on her God became ever dearer and more comprehensible to me.

When lecturing me, my grandfather, too, used to say that God was all-knowing, all-seeing, omnipresent, a support to man in all his affairs. But grandfather did not pray like grandmother.

Before going to the icon corner in the morning, he would carefully wash and dress and comb his red hair and beard; then, after inspecting himself in the mirror, adjusting his blouse, while looking, and tying the black cravat he wore inside his vest, would he creep stealthily toward the icons. He always came to a halt at one and the same knot in the floor board which resembled the eye of a horse, his arms stiff at his sides like a soldier's. After a moment's silence, during which he stood with bowed head, thin and straight, he would say impressively:

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!”

It always seemed to me that the room became particularly quiet after these words—even the flies seemed to buzz with a certain veneration.

Now his head was thrown back, his eyebrows bristling, his golden beard horizontal with the floor. He said his prayers in a firm voice, as though reciting a lesson, pronouncing the words distinctly and demandingly:

“Cometh the Judgement Day when no man knoweth, to expose the deeds of men...”

Beating himself on the chest, he would press his request:

“Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned...”

Hide Thy face from my sins...”

Every word was stressed as he recited the “Creed”, and he seemed to beat time by jerking his right leg. He stood there neat and clean and demanding, drawing his whole body toward the icons, seeming to grow taller and thinner.

“Thou, who hast borne the Great Healer, heal my passions and cleanse my heart of all evil; hark to the groaning of my soul and have mercy, O Mother of God!”

Then he would wail loudly, the tears gleaming in his green eyes:

“Let my faith be accounted for works, O my God, and lay not a burden beyond my strength to bear...”

He crossed himself again and again, quickly and convulsively, nodding his head like a butting goat and speaking in a screaming, whimpering voice. When in later life I had occasion to visit a synagogue, I realised that my grandfather prayed like a Jew.

The samovar had long since been steaming on the table, the room was filled with the scent of hot rye cakes stuffed with cottage cheese, and my stomach was roaring with hunger. My grandmother stood leaning against the door jamb, sighing and frowning, with her eyes fastened on the floor; the sun glanced merrily through the window, the dew shone like pearls on the trees, the morning air bore the fresh scent of dill, currants, and ripening apples, but my grandfather still continued to rock and scream at his prayers:

“Quench the fire of my passion, for I be base and accursed!”

I knew all his matins and all his vespers by heart, and would follow him with intense concentration to see whether he made a mistake or left out anything.

Such occasions were rare, but they always roused in me a malicious sense of triumph.

When my grandfather had finished his prayers, he turned to me and my grandmother and said:

“Good morning.”

We bowed, and at long last took our places at the table.

“You left out ‘sufficient’,” I said, turning to my grandfather.

“Sure you’re not lying?” he asked sceptically.

“No. You should have said, ‘And may my faith be sufficient unto my need’, but you left out ‘sufficient’.”

“Humph!” he exclaimed, blinking guiltily.

Some day he would repay me with interest for that remark, but for the present I took my fill of pleasure in his embarrassment.

One day my grandmother said jokingly:

“Must be boring for God to listen to your prayers, father—always saying one and the same thing.”

“Wha-a-t?” he drawled menacingly. “What’s that you’re gibbering?”

“It’s never a word from your own soul you offer your Maker, that’s what I’m saying.”

Trembling and turning purple, he jumped up on a chair and threw a saucer at my grandmother.

“Get out of here, you old witch!” he screeched like a saw on glass.

Whenever he spoke about the strong arm of God, he emphasised its ruthlessness: once, for example, when people sinned they were drowned in a flood; another time their cities were burned and destroyed; people were punished by famine and plague. For him, God was a raised sword, a lash held over the heads of the wicked.

“Any as violates the laws of God is sure to come to some bad end!” he warned me, tapping the table with his bony fingers.

It was difficult for me to believe in the cruelty of God. I was suspicious that grandfather had invented this in order to make me afraid of himself, rather than of God.

“Is it to make me obey you that you tell me this?” I asked candidly.

"Of course," he replied with equal candour. "A fine thing it would be if you didn't obey!"

"What about grandmother?"

"Don't you listen to that old fool," he said sternly. "She's been that way all her life—crazy and unlearned. I'll let her know she's not to talk to you about such important things. Now answer me this: how many ranks are there among the angels?"

I answered and then asked:

"What does it mean, 'A person of high rank'?"

"Have to know everything, don't you?" he smiled ironically, dropping his eyes and chewing his lips. On second thought he explained reluctantly:

"That's got nothing to do with God, that's human business—people of high rank—government officials and the like. An official is as lives off the law—chews it and swallows it."

"What's the law?"

"The law? That's, so to speak, what people take on as their habit," answered the old man, his sharp, clever eyes twinkling with relish. "People live together and come to an agreement among themselves: that, for example, is the best way to do something or other, so they take it on as a habit, make it a rule, or a law, as they call it. Like when the boys get together to play a game and decide among themselves how they'll play. What they decide on is the law."

"And the officials?"

"They're like the bad boys who come and break the law."

"Why?"

"That's not a thing for you to understand," he said with a frown. "The Lord stands over all the affairs of men. They want one thing; He wants another. Nothing sure about human affairs. Just one little breath from the Lord, and everything gets scattered to the wind like so much dust."

There were many reasons why I was interested in officials, so I kept pressing my point:

"There's that song Uncle Yakov sings:

*"The holy angels—servants of God,
The state officials—slaves of Satan!"*

My grandfather closed his eyes, lifted his beard on his palm and stuck it into his mouth. From the trembling of his cheeks, I could tell he was laughing inside.

"Have to put you and Yakov in a sack and throw you in the river," he said. "He has no business singing such songs and you have no business listening to them. That's a song made up by dissenters and heretics—a bad sort of joke."

He looked past me in a moment's meditation, then added with a sigh, "Phooh! What people!"

While in his conception God stood high and menacing above men, he, like my grandmother, involved the Lord in all his affairs—Him and an endless number of saints. The only saints my grandmother seemed to recognise were Nicholas, Yuri, Frol and Lavr, who were kind and good, spending their time wandering from village to village, from town to town, helping people and sharing all their human qualities. Almost all of my grandfather's saints, on the other hand, were martyrs who had torn down idols and pitted themselves against the Caesars, as a result of which they had been tortured, burned at the stake and skinned alive.

Sometimes my grandfather would say wistfully:

"If only the Lord would help me sell this house for a profit of even five hundred rubles, I'd hold a service for St. Nicholas!"

My grandmother would laugh and say to me:

"The old fool! Like as if Nicholas had nothing better to do than sell houses for him!"

For many years I kept my grandfather's church calendar with various remarks written in his hand. Opposite the days of Joachim and Anna he had inscribed in red ink:

"Saved by their mercy from great misfortune."

I remember what that misfortune was. In his efforts to help his worthless children he had secretly begun to lend money, taking various articles of value as security. Someone reported this, and one night the police came to search our house. There was great excitement, but everything ended well. My grandfather prayed until sunrise, and in the morning he wrote those words on the calendar in my presence.

Before supper he and I read the Psalter, the prayer book, or the heavy volume of Yefrem Sirin. After supper he once more began to pray, and in the evening silence his monotonous words of repentance went on and on:

“It is Thine to give, and Thine to take away, most merciful immortal King... Lead us not into temptation... Protect us from the wicked... Let my tears absolve me of sin...”

Often my grandmother would say:

“Oh, how tired I am! Looks like I’ll be going to bed without saying my prayers tonight!”

My grandfather took me to church: on Saturdays to vespers, on Sundays to late mass. Even at church I could tell which God people prayed to: the priest and the deacon prayed to grandfather’s God, but the choir always sang to grandmother’s.

To be sure, I have given a crude picture of the childish distinction I drew between the two Gods, a distinction which I remember having caused me much spiritual conflict. I feared and disliked grandfather’s God, who loved no one and kept a stern eye on everyone. He was primarily interested in unearthing something wicked and vicious in man. It was clear that he did not trust people, was ever waiting for them to repent, and took pleasure in meting out punishment.

During those days my mind dwelled primarily on God, the greatest beauty in life. All other impressions repulsed and saddened me with their filth and cruelty. God—my grandmother’s God, friend to all living things—was the brightest and best of all that surrounded me. And naturally I could not understand why grandfather was blind to God’s goodness.

I was not allowed to play out in the street because this excited me too much. I became almost drunk from the impressions gained from playing there and was often the cause of some fight or disorder. I made no friends; the neighbours’ children were hostile toward me. I hated to be called a Kashirin, and knowing this, they insisted on shouting the name to each other:

“Here comes the grandson of Kashirin, the miser! Take a look!”

“Knock him down!”

And the fight would begin.

I was exceptionally strong for my age and a good fighter. Even my enemies admitted this and never attacked me singlehanded. So I always took a good beating at their hands, and returned home with a bloody nose, cut lips, bruises and torn clothes.

Grandmother would meet me with fright and commiseration.

"What! Been fighting again, you little brat? I'll show you all right! Where'll I begin?"

She would wash my face and put a coin, or some herbs, or goulard on my injuries, saying the while:

"What in the world makes you fight like this? Such a quiet lad at home, but a very demon once you get out in the street! For shame! I'll tell your grandfather not to let you out!"

Grandfather always noticed the bumps and bruises, but he never got really angry about them, simply muttering:

"Earned yourself more shiners, brave warrior? Don't let me catch you in the street again, d'you hear?"

The street never had any attraction to me until I heard the merry voices of the children. Then I would forget my grandfather's warning and run out of the yard. I did not mind the bumps and bruises, but I could never get used to the brutality of the boys' fun, a brutality with which I had become only too familiar and which nearly drove me mad. I could not bear to see them set cocks and dogs fighting each other, torture cats, chase the goats belonging to Jews, tease drunken beggars and the touched-in-the-head "Death-in-the-Pocket Igosha".

The latter was a tall, lean, grimy person with a bristling beard on his bony, rusty face. His stooped figure in a long sheepskin coat swayed strangely as he moved down the street, his eyes fixed on the ground. His dark face with its sad little eyes inspired me with awe and respect. It seemed to me that this person must be engaged in some very solemn task and he was not to be disturbed.

But the boys ran after him and threw stones at his hunched back. For some time he would pay no attention to them, as if he did not feel the blows, but all of a sudden he would stop, throw back his head and look around, adjusting his shaggy cap with a convulsive movement as if just aroused from sleep.

"Igosha, Death-in-the-Pocket! Igosha, where are you off to? Look in your pocket—see death there?" cried the boys.

Grabbing hold of his pocket, he would bend over, pick up a stone or a lump of earth and wave his long arm clumsily, muttering foul words. He always used the same three—the boys' vocabulary was incomparably richer. Sometimes he

would run limping after them; his long coat would get in his way and he would fall on his knees, supporting himself with grimy arms that looked like two dry sticks. Then the boys would pelt him with stones, while the bolder ones would run up to him, throw a handful of dust on his head and dodge away.

Perhaps the most painful sight the street had to offer was that of our former master-workman Grigori Ivanovich. He had gone completely blind and spent his days wandering through the city begging. Tall and silent and comely, he was led by a grey little old woman who would stop at every window and say in a squeaky little voice:

“Help a blind beggar, for the love of Christ...”

Grigori Ivanovich would say nothing. His black glasses looked straight into the wall of the house or the window or the face of anyone he met; his dye-saturated hand would quietly stroke his broad beard, but his lips were always tightly closed. I often saw him, but never did I hear a sound from those tight lips, and this silence oppressed me more than anything else. I never went up to him—I could not make myself do this—but whenever I saw him I would run home and say to my grandmother:

“Grigori is coming!”

“Ah!” she would exclaim with pained agitation. “Here, run and give him this!”

I rudely refused. Then she herself would go out the gate and stand talking to him for a long time. He would smile and shake his beard, but say scarcely a word.

Sometimes grandmother would bring him into the kitchen and feed him. Once he asked where I was. Grandmother called me, but I ran away and hid in the wood pile. I could not meet him. I felt horribly ashamed in his presence, and I knew that my grandmother felt the same. Only once did she and I speak about Grigori. When she had seen him out the gate, she came walking slowly back through the yard weeping, her head bent down. I went over to her and took her hand.

“Why do you always run away from him?” she asked quietly. “So fond he is of you, and a good man...”

“Why doesn’t grandfather feed him?” I asked.

“Grandfather?”

She stopped and drew me to her and whispered prophetically:

"Remember my words: the Lord will send us a bitter punishment for this! A bitter punishment!"

She was not mistaken. Some ten years later, when my grandmother had already gone to her rest, my crazed grandfather himself walked the streets of the city begging miserably at the windows for something to eat.

"Good folks, give me a piece of *pirog*—just a little piece... Phoooh, such people!"

That bitter, heart-rending "Phoooh, such people!" was the only thing left of his former self.

In addition to Igosha and Grigori Ivanovich, there was the profligate old woman Voronikha, the very sight of whom was enough to drive me off the street. She put in her appearance every Sunday—huge, dishevelled, drunken. She had a peculiar walk, as though she did not move her feet or touch the ground, but sailed like a storm cloud, shrilling her lewd songs. The people on the street fled before her, hiding in stores, around corners, behind fences. She swept the street clean. Her face was blue and bloated like a balloon; her bulging grey eyes rolled mockingly and frighteningly. Sometimes she would wail:

"Where are my children, my children?"

I asked my grandmother what that meant.

"It's not for you to know," she said at first, but then she explained in a few words: the woman's husband had once been an official named Voronov. In order to be promoted to higher rank, he had sold his wife to his chief, who took her away for two years. When she returned, her children—a boy and a girl—were dead, her husband had gambled away public funds and was in jail. In her grief she began to drink and lead a profligate life. Now the police took her off the street every Sunday.

There was no doubt about it—home was better than on the streets. It was particularly pleasant during the hours after dinner when grandfather went to visit Uncle Yakov and grandmother would sit at the window telling me stories and reminiscences of my father.

She had clipped the broken wing of the starling rescued from the cat and cleverly attached a little stick to the stump of the bird's leg. Now that it was well, my grandmother tried to teach it to talk. For an hour at a time she would stand before the cage on the window sill—a large, kind animal—

and keep repeating the words she wanted to teach the bird.

“Come now, say: birdy wants some porridge!”

The bird would cock its round eye at her like the proverbial humourist, knock its wooden leg against the floor of the cage, stretch its neck and whistle like an oriole, imitate a jay and a cuckoo, attempt to meow like a cat, or bark like a dog, but it had a hard time reproducing human sounds.

“Enough of your nonsense!” my grandmother would say very seriously. “Try it now: birdy wants some porridge!”

If the feathered monkey would screech something faintly resembling my grandmother’s words, she would laugh with joy and feed it a bit of millet porridge from her finger.

“Oh, I know you all right, you trickster!” she would say. “You can say anything if you want to!”

And she actually taught it to speak: after some time it asked for porridge quite clearly, and on seeing my grandmother would cry something which sounded extremely like “Hello!”

At first the bird hung in my grandfather’s room, but soon he outlawed it to our attic, because it began to imitate him; my grandfather enunciated his prayers very distinctly, and the starling would poke its yellow beak through the bars of the cage and say:

“True, true, oo, oo, tru-u-ue, oh, too true!”

This offended my grandfather. One day he interrupted his prayers, stamped his foot and cried angrily:

“Take that devil out of here before I kill it!”

There was much that was interesting and much that was amusing in our house, but sometimes I was overwhelmed by a vast longing. It was as though a great burden were weighing me down, and I went on living at the bottom of a deep, inky pit, bereft of sight and hearing and feeling—blind and only half alive.

My Apprenticeship

(An excerpt)

It is both sad and amusing to recall how much insult and injury and trepidation my sudden passion for reading caused me.

It seemed to me that the books belonging to the cutter's wife were terribly expensive, and in the fear that my old mistress would burn them up, I tried to put them out of my mind and began to take little bright-coloured books from the shop where I bought the bread for breakfast...

I did my reading up in the attic or out in the shed when I went to chop wood. Both places were equally cold and uncomfortable. If the book was particularly interesting or if I had to finish it in a hurry, I would get up at night and read by the light of a candle. But the old woman noticed that the candles diminished during the night and took to measuring them with a splinter of wood which she hid away. I usually discovered the splinter and evened it down to the size of the burnt candle, but if I failed to do so, and in the morning she noticed a discrepancy between the length of the candle and the splinter, she would raise such a hullabaloo in the kitchen that Victor once shouted indignantly from his bunk:

"Quit your barking, mom! There's no living with you! Of course he burns the candles, because he reads books—gets them down at the store. I've seen him. Go search the attic."

The old woman rushed up into the attic where she found a little book which she tore to shreds.

Naturally this was a blow, but it only fanned my desire to read. I was certain that if one of the saints should land in this house, my employers would begin to teach him how to behave, and in general to make him over as they saw fit; and they would do this only for lack of something better to do. If they should ever stop shouting and passing judgment on people and maltreating them, they would turn into mutes, unable to speak at all, and quite unaware of themselves. In order to be aware of oneself, a person must bear some conscious relationship to others. The only relationship my employers knew was that of teacher and judge, and if a person brought himself to live according to their pattern, they would judge him even for that. Such was their nature.

I resorted to various subterfuges in order to read. Several times the old woman destroyed my books so that I finally found myself in debt to the shopkeeper to the enormous amount of forty-seven kopecks! He demanded immediate payment and threatened to take it out of my employers' money when I came for bread.

"What'll happen then?" he asked teasingly.

I found him unbearably repugnant; apparently he sensed this, for he took special delight in torturing me with all sorts of threats. Whenever I entered the shop his blotched face would spread in a smile.

"Have you brought the money you owe me?" he would ask mildly.

"No."

This seemed to disconcert him, he would frown.

"No? What am I supposed to do with you? Set the law on you, so's they'll ship you off to some reformatory?"

I had no means of getting the money, for my pay was given to my grandfather. I did not know what to do. When I asked the shopkeeper to wait for his money, he extended his hand, as puffy and greasy as a pancake, and said:

"Kiss it. I'll wait."

I picked up a weight from the counter and aimed it at his head; he ducked and shouted:

"Hey, what are you doing? I was just fooling!"

I felt that he was not fooling, and decided to steal the money in order to be rid of him. I often found loose change in my master's pockets when I brushed his clothes in the morning; sometimes it would fall out on the floor, and once a coin rolled into the woodpile under the stairs. I forgot to tell my master about it until some time later, when I chanced to come upon a twenty-kopeck piece among the wood. When I returned it, his wife said to him:

"See? You must count your money when you leave it in your pockets."

"Oh, he wouldn't steal anything," he replied, smiling at me.

Now that I had resolved to steal the money I recalled his words and his trusting smile. That made it hard for me. Several times I took some change out of his pockets, counted it, and—put it back. I struggled with myself for three days, and then all of a sudden things were settled very simply.

"What's the matter with you these days, Peshkov?" asked my master unexpectedly. "You're not yourself. Feeling bad?"

I told him frankly what was worrying me.

"Just see what books lead to," he said with a frown. "In one way or another they're sure to bring you to harm."

But he gave me fifty kopeks with the warning:

"Mind you don't let my wife or my mother know or there'll be trouble."

Then he added with a good-natured laugh:

“You’re a persistent little devil, damn it all! That’s all right—not a bad trait. But give up the books! With the new year I’ll subscribe to a good newspaper and then you’ll have something to read...”

Fortunately for me, the old woman went to sleep in the nursery after the nurse went on a drinking bout. Victor did not prevent me from reading; when everyone was asleep, he would quietly dress himself and vanish until morning. My mistress always took the candle into the other room, so that I was left without a light. Since I had no money to buy a candle, I began to secretly gather the wax off the candlesticks and put it into an empty sardine tin, adding some icon-lamp oil to it and twisting a wick out of thread. In this way I obtained a smoky sort of lamp which I placed up on the stove.

Whenever I turned a page of an enormous volume, the little red tongue of flame would flicker and threaten to go out; the wick kept sinking in the smelly wax, and the smoke stung my eyes; but all these handicaps were as nothing compared to the delight with which I studied the illustrations and read the explanations beneath them.

Ever broader grew my view of the world, adorned with fabulous cities, lofty mountains and beautiful seashores. Life became wonderfully expanded, and the earth waxed fairer as I was made aware of its multiplicity of towns and peoples and interests. Now as I gazed at the expanses beyond the Volga, I realised that they represented more than empty space. I had always felt particularly depressed when looking out upon this hinterland: the meadows lay flat upon the earth, relieved only by dark patches of thickets; beyond the meadows rose a jagged rim of forest surmounted by a cold, cloudy sky, the earth was empty and lonely. My heart too became empty, and disturbed by a soft sadness; all desire vanished; there was nothing to think of, and I wanted only to close my eyes. No hope dwelt in this desolate wilderness, which drained the heart of every wish.

The texts to the illustrations told in simple language about other lands and other people; they spoke of various events of the past and the present, many of which I did not understand, and this irked me. Sometimes my brain would be pierced by strange words like “metaphysics”, “chiliasm”, “Chartist”.

They would worry me to death, growing in my mind until they overshadowed everything else, and it seemed to me that I would never understand anything if I failed to discover the meaning of these words. It was just they which stood guard at the threshold of all mysteries. Often whole sentences would remain in my memory, like splinters in the flesh, keeping me from thinking of anything else.

I remember reading some strange lines:

*O'er the desert rides Attila,
Steel-clad leader of the Huns,
Dark and silent as the grave.*

Behind him rode a black cloud of warriors, shouting:

Where is Rome, Rome the mighty?

I knew that Rome was a city, but who were the Huns? This I had to find out.

When a convenient moment presented itself, I asked my master.

"The Huns?" he asked in some surprise. "The devil only knows who they were. Probably just some..."

He shook his head disapprovingly.

"Your head's packed full of rubbish, Peshkov, and that's very bad."

Good or bad, I had to know.

I assumed that Solovyov, the regiment priest, must know who the Huns were, and on meeting him in the yard, I asked him.

He was pale and ailing and always irritable, with red eyes, no eyebrows, and a little yellow beard.

"What do you care?" he queried, poking his black staff into earth.

When I put the question to Lieutenant Nesterov, he only replied fiercely:

"Wha-a-at?"

I decided I must go to the chemist's shop and ask the friendly chemist; he had an intelligent face and wore gold-rimmed spectacles on his big nose.

"The Huns," said Pavel Goldberg, the chemist, "were a nomad people like the Kirghiz. They don't exist any more—they all died out."

I was disappointed and annoyed, not because the Huns had

died out, but because the meaning of this word, which had tortured me so, proved to be so simple and of so little significance for me.

But I was very grateful to the Huns. After my experience with them, words ceased to harass me, and thanks to Attila I made the acquaintance of chemist Goldberg.

This man knew the simple meaning of all the learned words, and he had the key to every secret. He would adjust his glasses with two fingers, look fixedly into my eyes through the thick lenses, and speak to me as though he were driving tacks into my head:

“Words, my little friend, are like leaves on a tree, and in order to know why the leaves are such as they are, you must know how the tree grows. You must study. Books, my little friend, are like a lovely garden, in which you will find everything that is pleasant and beneficial.”

I often ran to the chemist’s shop for soda and magnesia for the adults, who were always suffering from heartburn, and for bay-oil and physics for the infants. The terse lectures of the chemist inspired me with a more serious attitude toward books, until without my noticing it they became as indispensable to me as vodka to a drunkard.

They showed me a different life, a life filled with great desires and emotions, leading people to crime or to heroism. I saw that the people about me were incapable of crime or heroism; they lived apart from all that the books wrote about, and it was difficult to discover anything interesting in their lives. One thing I knew—I did not want to live as they did.

From the texts below the illustrations I learned that in Prague and London and Paris there were no garbage-filled dams and gullies in the centre of the city. There the streets were straight and wide, the buildings and churches entirely different. And the people were not locked indoors by a six-month winter, nor was there a Lent during which one could eat nothing but sauerkraut, salted mushrooms, oat flour, and potatoes served with loathsome linseed oil. During Lent it was forbidden to read books. The *Picture Review* was taken away, and I was forced to become a part of this empty, lenten life. Now that I was in a position to compare it with the life described in books, it seemed even more drab and ugly. Under the influence of my reading I felt stronger, and I worked with a will and a vengeance because I had an aim: the

sooner I finished, the more time I would have for reading. Deprived of my books, I became lazy and listless, and possessed of a morbid forgetfulness I had never known before.

I remember that it was during these dull days that a mysterious event occurred. One evening when everyone had gone to bed, the cathedral bell suddenly began to boom. Immediately everyone woke up and rushed to the windows half dressed.

"An alarm? A fire?" they asked each other.

We could hear people in other flats moving about and banging doors. Someone ran through the yard leading a horse by the bridle. My old mistress shouted that the cathedral had been robbed, but my master hushed her.

"Quiet, mother, anyone can tell that's no alarm!"

"Well then, the bishop's died."

Victor climbed down off his bunk.

"I know what's happened, I know," he muttered as he pulled on his clothes.

My master sent me up into the attic to see if the sky were glowing. I ran upstairs and climbed through a dormer window out on to the roof. There was no glow, but the big bell continued to toll in the quiet, frozen air. The snow crunched under the running feet of invisible people and there was a screeching of sleigh runners. Ever more ominous sounded the big bell. I returned downstairs.

"There's no fire."

"Tut, tut!" said my master who was already in hat and coat. He pulled up the collar and began uncertainly to push his feet into his galoshes.

"Don't go, don't go," pleaded his wife.

"Nonsense."

Victor, who was also in hat and coat, kept teasing everyone by saying:

"I know what it is!"

When the brothers had left, the women ordered me to heat the samovar, while they stationed themselves at the windows; but almost immediately my master rang the bell, ran silently up the stairs, opened the hall door, and announced in a thick voice:

"The Tsar's been assassinated!"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the old woman.

"Yes, he's been assassinated. An officer told me. What'll happen now?"

Presently Victor rang the bell and said testily as he pulled off his things:

"And I thought it was war!"

After that everybody sat down to drink tea and talked in hushed, guarded voices. It had become still outside; the bell had stopped tolling. For two days people continued to whisper mysteriously and to go visiting and to receive visitors and to recount something in detail. I tried hard to understand just what had happened, but my employers hid the newspapers from me, and when I asked Sidorov why they had killed the Tsar, he answered softly:

"It's forbidden to talk about it."

The whole affair was quickly forgotten, eclipsed by the cares of daily life, and soon I had a most unpleasant experience.

One Sunday when the family had gone to early mass and I had set about tidying up the flat, after first heating the samovar, the eldest child entered the kitchen, pulled the tap out of the samovar, and crawled under the table to play with it. The samovar pipe was filled with live coals, so that when the water ran out, the whole thing came unsoldered. From the other room I could hear it rumbling with strange fury. I rushed into the kitchen and saw to my horror that it had turned dark blue and was shaking as though with the ague. The unsoldered pipe to which the tap had been fastened was dangling dejectedly, the lid had careened, melted pewter was dripping from under the handles, and the blue-black samovar looked for all the world as if it were drunk. When I poured cold water over it, it hissed and collapsed sadly on to the floor.

At that moment the bell rang. When I opened the door, the old woman's first question was whether the samovar had boiled.

"Yes, it has," I answered briefly.

This answer, no doubt dictated by fear and shame, was looked upon as a bad attempt at humour, and my punishment was increased accordingly. I was given a beating. The old woman administered it with a bundle of pine laths; the operation was not very painful, but it left innumerable splinters deeply imbedded in my flesh. By evening my back

had swollen up like a pillow, and by noon of the next day my master had to take me to the hospital.

When the doctor, who was comically tall and thin, had examined me, he said in a deep, calm voice:

"I must draw up an official testimony to cruelty."

My master blushed and shifted his feet and began to mumble something to the doctor, but the latter gazed over his head and answered tersely:

"Can't do it. Have no right."

Then he turned to me and said:

"Do you wish to file a complaint?"

My back hurt terribly but I said:

"No, I don't. Just hurry and do something for me."

They led me into another room, laid me on a table, and the doctor pulled out the splinters with some delightfully cold pincers, joking the while:

"A fine job they made of this hide of yours, youngster. You'll be waterproof from now on."

When he had finished his work, tickling me unbearably, he said:

"I pulled out forty-two splinters, youngster! That's something for you to boast to your pals about! Come back to have the bandage changed tomorrow at this same time. Do they beat you often?"

"Used to beat me oftener," I replied after a moment's consideration.

The doctor laughed in his deep voice.

"Everything's for the better, youngster; everything's for the better!"

When he took me back to my master, he said to him:

"Here he is, good as new. Send him back tomorrow, we'll bind him up again. Lucky for you he has a sense of humour."

While we were riding back in the droshky, my master said to me:

"They used to beat me too, Peshkov. What's to be done about it? And how they beat me, brother! At least you have me to feel sorry for you, but nobody ever felt sorry for me. Nobody at all. Mobs of people everywhere, and not a single bastard to show you any pity! Ah me, such roaring chickens!"

He went on this way throughout the journey; I felt sorry for him and was grateful to him for speaking to me so kindly.

When we reached home I was greeted like a conquering

hero. The women made me tell them how the doctor had taken out the splinters and what he had said. They interrupted my tale with oh's and ah's, smacking their lips and frowning over the gory details. I was amazed by their morbid interest in illness and pain and all sorts of unpleasantness.

Seeing how pleased they were that I had refused to file a complaint against them, I asked permission to borrow books from the cutter's wife. They dared not refuse under the circumstances, but the old woman exclaimed in surprise:

"Aren't you a little devil though!"

On the following day I was standing in front of the cutter's wife, hearing her say to me:

"But they told me you were ill and had been taken to the hospital! Just see how false rumours are!"

I kept silent. I was ashamed to tell her the truth—why should she be troubled with anything so coarse and sad? I was happy that she did not resemble other people.

Once more I read the thick volumes of Dumas-the-Elder, Ponson du Terrail, Montépin, Zaccane, Gaboriau, Aimard, and Boisgobey. I read these books quickly, one after another, and they made me happy. I felt that I was part of an extraordinary life, and this stirred sweet emotions, filling me with energy. Once more my homemade lamp was set to smoking, for I read the night through, until the very dawn. My eyes grew inflamed, and my old mistress would say gloatingly:

"Just wait, you bookworm, your eyes will burst and you'll go blind!"

Very soon I perceived that all these interesting books, despite variety of plot and differences of setting, said the same thing, namely: good people are always unhappy and persecuted by bad people; bad ones are always more lucky and clever than good ones, but in the end some inexplicable factor conquers evil, and virtue inevitably triumphs. I became sick of the "love" about which all the men and women spoke in exactly the same words. Besides being boring, this banality roused vague suspicions.

Sometimes, I would guess after reading a few pages who would triumph in the end and who would be defeated: as soon as the tangle of the plot became evident, I would set myself to unravelling it. Putting aside the book, I would ponder over it like a problem in mathematics, and ever more often would

be correct in my solutions as to which of the characters would land in paradise, which be condemned to purgatory.

But beyond all this I became aware of a fact of vast importance to me; I glimpsed the contours of another sort of life with other relationships. It was clear to me that in Paris the cabbies, workmen, soldiers, and all the "rabble" were not like those in Nizhni-Novgorod, Kazan, and Perm. They spoke more boldly to the gentles, conducting themselves in their presence with greater ease and independence. Here was a soldier, but he did not resemble a single soldier of my acquaintance—neither Sidorov, nor the soldier on the steamer, nor yet Yermokhin; he was more of a human being than they. He had something in common with Smury, while being less crude. Or here was a shopkeeper, but again he was better than any of the shopkeepers of my acquaintance. Nor were the priests in the books like the priests I knew. They had more love and sympathy for people. In general, life abroad as depicted in the books was better, easier, and more interesting than the life I knew. In foreign countries people did not fight so often and so brutally, did not make the vicious sport of a man the passengers had made of that soldier on the steamer, and did not pray to God as vehemently as my old mistress.

I noticed especially that when describing villains, people of base and greedy character, the books did not show them possessed of that inexplicable cruelty and that passion to mock others which was so familiar to me. The villains in the book were cruel in a practical way; their cruelty was almost always comprehensible. But I had seen senseless, purposeless cruelty merely for the sake of amusement, without any other purpose.

Every new book emphasised the difference between life in Russia and life in other countries, rousing in me a vague dissatisfaction and increasing my suspicion that these thumbed yellow pages were not entirely truthful.

Then Goncourt's novel *The Brothers Zemganno* fell into my hands. I read it in one night, and my wonder at the novelty of it led me to reread the sad, simple tale. It contained no complicated plot, no superficial attractions; at first it even seemed as dry and serious as the *Lives of the Saints*. The language, so exact and unembellished, at first disappointed me, but the laconic words and strongly-built phrases went so

directly to my heart and gave such a convincing account of the drama of these acrobat brothers that my hands trembled with joy. I cried till I thought my heart would break when the poor acrobat with broken legs climbed up into the attic to his brother, who was secretly practising their beloved art.

When I returned this wonderful book to the cutter's wife I asked her to give me another just like it.

"What do you mean by another just like it?" she asked with a laugh.

Her laugh embarrassed me, and when I could not explain what I wanted, she said:

"That's a dull book. Just wait and I'll find a better one for you, something more interesting."

In a few days she gave me Greenwood's *True Story of a Little Ragamuffin*. I winced self-consciously at the title of the book, but the very first page brought a smile of delight which continued until I had read it from cover to cover, rereading certain passages two and three times.

So even abroad little boys found life difficult! Indeed, my life seemed easy in comparison; in other words, there was no reason to lose heart.

I received great encouragement from Greenwood, and soon thereafter I came upon one of the really "right" books—*Eugénie Grandet*.

Old man Grandet reminded me vividly of my grandfather. I was sorry that the book was so short, and amazed at the amount of truth it contained. Life had made this truth only too familiar to me, but the book revealed it in a new light, the light of calm, dispassionate observation. All the authors I had read except Goncourt passed judgment on people in the stern, vociferous manner of my employers, often making the reader sympathise with the villain and become exasperated with the virtuous characters. I had always been vexed to see that no matter how much thought and effort a person expended, he was always thwarted in his searchings by these same virtuous people, who stood in his path from the first page to the last, implacable as a stone wall. To be sure, the evil intentions of vice were certain to be dashed to pieces against this wall, but stone is not a substance to rouse one's affections. However strong and beautiful a wall, if you are intent on reaching the apples growing behind this wall, you have little inclination to admire it. And it always seemed to me that whatever was

most true and most important remained hidden somewhere behind virtue...

There were neither villains nor heroes in Goncourt, Greenwood, and Balzac. There were only simple people who were marvellously alive. No one could doubt that everything they said and did was said and done in just that way and could not possibly have been said or done in any other.

In this way I got to know the great joy of reading a “good book, a right book”.

1913-1923

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

A. Serafimovich

(b. 1863, Cossack village of
Nizhnekurmoyarskaya
on the Don—d. 1949,
Moscow)

Alexander Serafimovich was already mature at the time of the October Revolution. A democrat in outlook and in the subject matter of his pre-revolutionary writing, Serafimovich welcomed the revolution whole-heartedly. During the Civil War, his work as a correspondent was highly appreciated by Lenin. It was in the heat of battle that he found the plot and characters for his most vivid and profound book, the novel THE IRON FLOOD.

THE IRON FLOOD is a strictly documentary narrative, telling how Red insurgents, encumbered by a wagon train with women, children, old men and stores, threatened with destruction at the hands of the whiteguards break through to join regular units of the Red Army surviving appalling hardships and losses on the way. But the documentary story carries over lofty symbolism of artistic generalisation.

Symbolic is the image of the people, so heterogeneous at first and so unified after overcoming the dead-

ly perils of the journey. Symbolic is the image of the commander, who has been chosen by the people themselves and who personifies inflexible will-power which alone can inspire thousands of people to act as one, motivated by the same goal and the same desire.

The Iron Flood

(An excerpt)

Sunshine again. The sea was dazzlingly bright, the outlines of the mountains were a powdery blue. They seemed gradually to lower themselves as the highroad twisted up, higher and higher.

Far below, the town became a tiny white patch which gradually disappeared. The blue bay was framed with piers like straight pencil lines. The abandoned Georgian ships were like black dots. Pity the Red soldiers could not take them along.

Nevertheless, they had managed to secure abundant miscellaneous booty; now they had six thousand shells and three hundred thousand cartridges. Fine Georgian horses straining at their shiny black traces were drawing sixteen Georgian guns. Georgian carts were loaded with diverse war supplies: field telephones, tents, barbed wire, and medicines. Ambulance carts were a welcome addition to the baggage train. No end of things had been taken, but two were lacking: wheat and hay.

Patiently the hungry horses plodded on, tossing their tired heads. The soldiers tightened their belts. But they were in good spirits, each of them now having two or three hundred cartridges in his belt. Sturdily they marched through the white clouds of hot dust, under a canopy of flies—the flies had become inseparable from the campaign. There was singing under the dazzling sun:

*There's a lot of vodka in the tavern,
Plenty of beer and mead...*

The carts, gigs, vans creaked along. Amid red pillows the heads of the emaciated children joggled.

People on foot made short-cuts to avoid the windings of the highroad. Along narrow paths, in single file, weary heads covered with thin old caps or battered, slouched hats of straw or felt, they proceeded, leaning on sticks. The women's feet were bare and their skirts ragged. They no longer needed to bother about their cattle or fowl straying—not a cow, pig, or chicken had survived. Hunger had even caused the dogs to disappear.

The endlessly winding stream of people resumed the uphill crawl amid arid rocks, along clefts and precipices in order to reach the top of the range and then again go down to the steppe where the food and forage would be abundant, where their own people awaited them.

*Let's forget our grief and troubles,
Let's all drink, let's all make merry...*

Toreador, attento, Toreador...

New records had been taken in the town.

Inaccessible peaks rose against the blue sky.

The small town, down below, lay in a blue haze. The contours of the bay were blurred. The sea rising like a blue wall disappeared behind the tops of the trees that bordered the highroad. Dust, heat, flies, landslides along the highroad, virgin forests—the kingdom of beasts.

In the evening an endless wailing drowned the creaking of the carts in the baggage train:

“Mamma ... I want to eat ... to eat ... eat...”

The mothers, their faces dark, peaked, bird-like, craned their necks and stared with inflamed eyes at the sharp bends of the ascending highroad as they hurried with bare feet beside the moving carts; they had nothing to say to their children.

Higher and higher they climbed. The forest became less dense and finally fell behind. Overhanging cliffs, deep gorges, huge towering rocks that seemed to be falling upon them... Each sound, each beat of the horses' hooves, the creaking of wheels reverberated everywhere, welling up and drowing out the chorus of human voices. Every now and then the column had to go round the carcasses of horses on the road.

Suddenly the heat abated. A wind started from the peaks. A grey twilight fell without warning. At once it became dark, and from the black sky torrents came pouring. It was not rain but a roaring flood that swept people off their feet and filled the swirling darkness with furious watery vortexes. It burst from above, from below, from all sides. Water cascaded down the ragged clothing of the marchers, over their matted hair. The column lost its bearings; people, carts, and horses straggled, were cut off from one another by driving torrents, neither seeing nor knowing what was going on around them.

Somebody was swept away, somebody was screaming. But the screams were drowned in the storm's fury. The water rushed, the wind seemed to bring the sky and the mountain tops down upon the heads of the climbers. Or perhaps—who could tell?—the whole train, with its carts and horses, was being swept away...

"Help!"

"It's the end of the world!"

They cried out aloud, but it was as though they merely whispered through their quivering blue lips.

Some of the horses, helpless against the onrush of the torrent, fell into an abyss, dragging after them a cart full of children; the people behind struggled on believing that the cart was still in front.

In other carts the children buried themselves in the drenched pillows and rags.

"Mamma ... mamma ... daddy!..."

Their desperate screaming was unheard against the roaring torrent. Stones, invisible in the murk, crashed down from unseen crags. The wind screamed with a thousand voices as it emptied itself of water.

Suddenly the infinite blackness of the mad night was lit by a dazzling blue shimmer. The outlines of the distant mountains became clear and sharp, and so were the indentations of the overhanging cliffs, the edge of the precipice, the horses' ears ... it hurt one's eyes to look at them; and everything was deathly still in that madly quivering light. The slanting stripes of the downpour were motionless in mid-air. motionless were the foaming streams, motionless the horses, a foreleg raised; motionless the people in their interrupted march, the dark mouths open in unfinished speech, motionless the tiny bluish hands of the children amidst the soaked pillows. All was frozen still in the silent, spasmodic tremor of light.

It seemed as if this deathly blue tremor would continue through the night, but it disappeared as suddenly as it had come, having lasted a second.

The black vastness of the night engulfed everything, and suddenly, drowning the crazy din, the mountainside crashed open and out of its entrails rolled out a terrific roar seeming too big even for the vastness of the night to hold; it split into great rounded fragments that went on exploding and rolling in

all directions, gaining strength as they rolled and filling all the abysses, gorges, and forests. People were deafened; the children lay as if they had been struck dead.

Baggage train, soldiers, guns, limber-chests, carts, refugees—all stood stock-still. People and carts surrendered to the fierce torrents, the wind, the roaring, the deathly quivering of the lightning. The energy of the marchers had been overtaxed. The horses were knee-deep in rushing water. There was no end or limit to the horrors of this mad night.

And in the morning the sun shone radiantly; the washed air was translucent, the blue mountains vaporous. The humans alone were black, their faces peaked, their eyes sunken; summoning the last reserves of their strength they helped the horses on the upward gradient. And the horses' heads were bony, their ribs stuck out like the hoops of barrels, and the hair on their hides was washed clean.

The casualties were reported to Kozhukh.

"It's like this, Comrade Kozhukh; three carts have been swept away, people and all, into the precipice. A gig has been smashed by a rolling boulder. Two men were struck by lightning. Two others from the third company are missing. Scores of fallen horses lie on the highroad."

Kozhukh gazed at the water-washed highway and at the craggy rocks.

"We shall not halt for the night," he said, "the march must be continued day and night. We must go on and on."

"The horses can't do it, Comrade Kozhukh. There isn't a handful of hay. When we went through forests we could give them leaves to eat, now there's only bare stones."

Kozhukh was silent for a moment.

"Go on without a moment's rest," he said. "If we stop, all the horses will perish. Write out the orders."

The mountain air was crystal pure, to breathe it was sheer joy, but for these tens of thousands of people the air held no fascination. They marched silently with lowered eyes beside the carts or guns, keeping to one side of the road. Dismounted cavalymen pulled horses after them by their bridles.

All around were barren and wild cliffs, the gaping clefts as if awaiting their prey. Mist crept in the gorges.

The dark rocks and clefts echoed with the insistent, never-ending creaking of carts, the rumbling of wheels, the

beat of hooves, rattling and clanking; the din, reverberating a thousand-fold, waxed into a continuous roar. All moved in silence; if one had uttered a cry it would have been drowned in this huge noisy movement which stretched over tens of versts.

Even the little children did not cry or ask for bread.

Their heads rolled from side to side listlessly on the pillows. There was no need for the mothers to quieten them, and the mothers did not pet or soothe them, they walked beside the carts, intently gazing at the loops of the crowded highroad ascending into the clouds. Their eyes were dry.

When a horse stopped, an overwhelming, wild terror possessed those in the cart. With savage frenzy those around seized the wheels, put their shoulders to the cart, swished their whips frantically, shouted in almost inhuman voices, but their efforts, their desperate straining, was lost in all that eternal creaking, multiplied a thousand-fold, of the countless wheels.

The horse would walk a pace or two, sway and drop in its tracks, breaking a shaft, and none could help it up again, its legs were stretched out stiff, its teeth bared, and the light of day was no longer reflected in its purplish eyes.

The children would be seized out of the cart. The mother pushed furiously the older ones to make them walk and took the little ones in her arms and on her back. When there were too many, the mother left one, and sometimes two, of the smallest in the abandoned cart, and walked on with hard dry eyes, without looking back. Behind her walked other people, without looking, the moving carts going round the abandoned cart, the live horses shying away from the dead horse, the live children passing by the abandoned live children—and that incessant, magnified creaking seemed to swallow up what had happened.

A mother who had carried her child for many miles began to sway, her knees sagged, the highroad, carts, and rocks floated in a mist about her.

“No, I’ll never get there...”

She sat on a heap of rubble by the roadside and gazed at her baby which she rocked in her arms as the carts endlessly passed by.

Her baby’s dark dry mouth was open. Its deep-blue eyes had a fixed gaze.

She was desperate.

"But I have no milk, my heart, my treasure, my little blossom!"

She covered with mad kisses this child who was her life, her only joy. But her eyes were dry.

The tiny dark mouth was rigid, and a white film crept over the gazing eyes. She pressed to her breast the small precious mouth, now growing cold.

"My little daughter, my little treasure, you shall not suffer any more, waiting for death to take you."

The little body in her arms slowly stiffened.

She made a hole in the rubble, lowered her treasure in it, took from her neck her baptismal cross and passed the sweat-drenched piece of tape over the heavy little head, threw some earth over the body, making the sign of the cross over it again and again.

People passed on without looking. The carts trailed by endlessly, and the multi-voiced, hungry creaking was echoed by the hungry rocks.

Far ahead, in the foremost ranks of the column, walked dismounted horsemen, dragging their tottering horses after them by the bridles. The horses' ears lopped like those of dogs.

The heat grew. Swarms of flies that had disappeared during the storm, sheltering under the carts, now made the air black and thick.

"Hey, boys! Why do you slink along like cats afraid to hold up your tails? Strike up a song!"

Nobody responded. All continued to step along slowly and wearily, the cavalymen dragging their horses after them.

"To hell with the lot of you. Turn on the gramophone, let it play..."

He rummaged in a bag for records, pulled out one at random, and began to spell out the words:

"'B-bi-bim, b-bo-bom' ... what the hell can that be? 'C-clo-owns ... who'll m-ma-make you l-laugh.' I wonder what that is! Well, play away!"

He wound up the gramophone that swayed on the back of a pack-horse and adjusted the record.

For a second or so his face expressed genuine amazement, then his eyes narrowed into slits and he grinned from ear to ear, showing every tooth in his head until he was rocking in a

fit of infectious, uncontrollable laughter. Instead of singing a song the gramophone was sending out of its trumpet staggering peals of laughter. Two people were laughing, first one, then the other, then both together. Laughing in the most extraordinary way, sometimes thinly, like little boys when they are tickled, sometimes in roars so that everything around shook. They laughed choking and one could imagine them waving their arms helplessly; they laughed hysterically, like women in fits of nerves; they split their sides, sounding as if they could never stop.

The dismounted cavalymen began to smile, glancing at the trumpet which could laugh so madly in all sorts of ways. A ripple of laughter spread in the ranks, people began to join in the merriment of the trumpet, and the laughter grew, swelling, rolling further and further away along the column.

It rolled down to the slowly marching infantry. There, too, the men laughed, ignorant of the cause that had released all this jubilation; they laughed because the laughter all around infected them, and, without check or restraint, the laughter was caught up by those in the rear.

“What the hell are they splitting their sides for?” people asked and themselves went off, waving their hands and wagging their heads in paroxysms of laughter.

The infantry laughed, and the baggage train laughed, the refugees laughed, the mothers laughed with mad terror lurking in their eyes; laughter had taken possession of people on a stretch of over fifteen versts and was shaking them to the incessant accompaniment of the hungrily creaking wheels amid those hungry rocks.

When this wave of laughter rolled down to Kozhukh, his face became the colour of tanned leather, then, for the first time in the campaign, it became white.

“What’s that?”

His aide, trying to restrain the laughter that was shaking him, said:

“Who can tell! They’ve gone mad. I’ll go and find out at once.”

Kozhukh snatched the whip out of the aide’s hand, gripped the bridle of his horse and clumsily got into the saddle. He lashed the horse’s ribs without mercy. The gaunt animal slowly walked on with lopped ears while the whip cut it to the raw, and then it managed to break into a kind of jog trot.

All around him was laughter.

Kozhukh felt the muscles of his own face twitch and resolutely clenched his teeth. At last he rode up to the laughing vanguard. Uttering a curse he brought his whip down upon the record with force.

"Stop that!"

The damaged record squeaked and became silent. And silence spread down the ranks extinguishing the laughter, leaving only the maddening, eternal creaking and rumbling which, echoing a thousand-fold, filled the air. The sharp teeth of the hungry precipices went slowly by.

Somebody cried out:

"The pass!"

The highroad began to loop downward.

* * *

"How many of them?"

"Five."

The forest, sky, and remote mountains floated desolately in the haze of heat.

"In a row?"

"Yes ..."

The Kuban patrolman, sweat streaming down his face, did not finish, jerked down to the mane of his horse. Its sides were covered with foam, the flies maddened it, and it was tossing its head trying to pull its bridle from its rider's hands.

Kozhukh was sitting in a britzka with his aide and driver. Their faces were dusky-red as if they had just come from a steam bath. Save for the patrolman there was not a living soul around.

"How far is it from the highroad?"

The Kuban horseman pointed to the left with his whip.

"Ten or fifteen versts, beyond the copse."

"Is there a side road?"

"Yes."

"No Cossacks about?"

"No Cossacks. Our people have ridden twenty versts ahead, no smell of Cossacks. At the farms they say the Cossacks are digging trenches beyond the river thirty versts from here."

The muscles were working in Kozhukh's face, which had suddenly become calm and yellow again.

"Stop the vanguard, turn the whole column into the side road, and make all regiments, refugees, and baggage trains file past those five."

The Kuban rider bent slightly over the pommel of his saddle and said deferentially to show that he had no intention of breaking discipline:

"It will take us far out of our way. As it is, people are dropping on the road. It's hot, they have no food ..."

Kozhukh's gimlet eyes piercing the quivering distance turned grey. Three days... People's faces were sunken, there was a hungry gleam in their eyes. They had not eaten for three days. The mountains had been crossed but one must still drive on to get out of the barren foothills, to reach the villages and find food for the people and horses. And one had to make haste, one could not let the Cossacks entrench themselves, could not afford to lose a minute, could not make a detour of ten or fifteen versts.

He looked at the youthful face of the Kuban rider, black from the heat and hunger. His eyes flashed, and he said through clenched teeth:

"Turn the army into the side road and let them see what's there."

"All right."

The Kuban horseman adjusted his sweat-soaked Astrakhan cap, lashed his guiltless horse, which became at once forgetful of the heat, the swarms of flies, and began to prance, then turned and trotted briskly off along the highroad.

There was, properly speaking, no highroad, but, in its stead, eddies of grey-white dust that rose above the tree tops and disappeared in the hills beyond. And in those whirling eddies one could feel the presence of thousands of hunger-driven human beings.

Kozhukh's britzka, all the wooden fittings of which were scorchingly hot, went on with a grating rattle. From under his seat the burning hot nose of a machine-gun peeped out.

The Kuban horseman rode into the thick stifling clouds. Nothing could be seen distinctly, but one could hear a host moving in ragged, straggling, weary, and broken ranks. Horsemen rode on, carts creaked. Sweat pouring down the dark faces put a dim gloss over them.

Nobody spoke, nobody laughed. They just moved along dragging their silence along with them. And that heavy,

stifling silence seemed to hold in it the disorderly shuffling of weary feet, weary hooves and the dreary creaking of the carts.

The horses moved along with low-bent heads and drooping ears.

The heads of the children rocked listlessly in the carts at every jerk, and their bared white teeth glistened dimly.

“Water ... water ...”

The choking white dust floated in the air, covering all, and in it moved, invisible, the ranks of the foot soldiers, rode the horsemen and the slow creaking carts. Perhaps this was not an implacable heat, not a floating white dust—but general despair pervading everything. Hope had fled, thought had been stifled, the inexorable alone remained. The iron bond forged between these people when they entered the narrow passage dividing the sea from the mountains and had been with them throughout, had now become a threatening rod. They were starved, barefoot, exhausted, ragged, tortured by the sun. And somewhere ahead were well-fed, fully armed, solidly entrenched Cossack regiments and rapacious generals.

The Kuban horseman rode through the dismally creaking, stifling clouds, calling out to know which units were passing.

Now and then the grey mist opened and in the rent quivered the outlines of the hills, and the silent forest, and the hazy blue sky. The sun blazed furiously and gleamed into the inflamed faces of the soldiers. But back again floated the mist, muffling the sound of shuffling feet, the irregular beat of hooves, the weary, hopeless creaking of the carts. Along the roadside, dimly discernible through the floating clouds, sat or lay the utterly exhausted, their heads thrown back, their parched, black mouths open, the flies swarming about them.

Stumbling against people and horses, the Kuban rider reached the vanguard, bent down and spoke to the commander. The latter frowned, glanced at the confused, moving mass which disappeared now and then in the mist, and shouted in a hoarse unfamiliar voice:

“Regiment ... halt!”

The stifling dust muffled his words, but they nevertheless reached the ears of those for whom they were meant and, fading in the distance, orders were shouted in various accents:

“Battalion, halt!”

“Company, halt!”

Then very far away a barely audible "Halt!" hung in the air and died out.

At the head of the column the stamping of feet stopped, and in quiet waves the cessation of all movement spread. In the obscure, furnace-hot mist came a moment when there fell utter quietness—the unfathomable quietness of endless exhaustion and submission to the heat. Then the men suddenly began to blow their noses, to cough up the stifling dust, to swear. They rolled themselves cigarettes of grass and leaves. The dust settled upon their faces, upon the heads of the horses, and upon the carts.

Some sat down on the banks of the ditches along the highroad, holding their rifles between their knees. Others lay on their backs, in the blazing sun.

The horses stood limply, with their heads down, submissive even to the plague of flies.

"Up! Get up!"

Nobody stirred. On the highroad people, horses, and carts remained where they were. It looked as if no force on earth could raise these people weighted with the heat—they were like a heap of stones.

"Get up! What the devil do you think you're doing?"

They rose one by one, by twos and threes, as if they had heard their death sentence; they did not fall into any kind of formation. Neither did they wait for a command; they wearily plodded on again, shouldering their heavy rifles and looking ahead with inflamed eyes.

They straggled along in the middle of the highroad, along the wayside and the slopes of the hills. The carts resumed their eternal creaking, and the clouds of flies again gathered overhead.

The whites of eyes gleamed in charred faces. Instead of hats the marchers wore on their heads to protect them against the broiling sun burdock leaves, twigs, ropes of twisted straw. Their feet were bare, torn, black. Some were stark naked, black as Negroes, with just a rag dangling in strips about their loins. Their dry, emaciated sinews protruded from under their black skin as they tramped on, their heads thrown back, carrying their rifles on their shoulders, their eyes screwed up to tiny slits, their parched mouths open. A dishevelled, bedraggled, black, naked horde, followed by the merciless heat, and stalked by hunger and despair. The white clouds of

dust rise languidly, seemingly against their will, and down from the hills to the steppe below creeps the endlessly billowing highroad.

Suddenly the unexpected command rang out.

"Left turn!"

Each unit as it came up heard in bewilderment:

"Left turn ... left ... left..."

They ran down to the side road first in amazed and then in willing crowds. The side road was stony, there was no dust on it, and one could see the units hurriedly turning down into it, the cavalry, then the creaking, heavily swaying baggage train, the gigs. A wide vista opened, copses glades, and blue mountains. The crazy sun still quivered in a fever of heat. The flies in thick, black swarms also took the side road. The slowly settling clouds of dust, the stifling silence were left behind, the wayside became alive with voices, exclamations, laughter.

"Where are they taking us?"

"Perhaps into a forest, to wet our parched throats a little."

"Idiot! They've got a feather-bed in the woods for you to stretch yourself out upon."

"They've got dumplings with cream."

"And butter."

"Thick clotted cream."

"And honey."

"And a cool water-melon."

A tall, bony man in a tattered, sweat-soaked evening coat and remnants of dirty white lace that covered nothing, spat angrily.

"Stop yapping. Shut up!"

He tightened his belt fiercely, drew in his belly to his ribs, and wrathfully changed his rifle from one bruised shoulder to the other.

Bursts of laughter disturbed the cloud of flies.

"Opanas, why have you covered your behind and left your front exposed? Turn your pants around else the women in the village won't give you anything to eat—they'll look the other way when you come up."

"Ha—ha—ha! Ho—ho—ho!"

"Boys, this means we're going to camp."

"But there are no villages here, I know."

"You can see telegraph posts going down from the highroad. They must lead to some village."

"Hey, cavalry! You must earn the bread you eat. Give us some music!"

From a pack saddle on the back of a horse the gramophone sent out huskily:

*Whither have you gone,
You golden days of spring?...*

The words floated in the torrid air, choked with wavering black clouds of flies, over the haggard but cheerily marching crowd. The people were caked in white dust, ragged, naked, and the sun glared at them with studied indifference. Their legs felt as if molten lead had been pumped into them; but a man lifted his high, creaking tenor voice in a song:

The good housewife knew it well...

His voice broke—his dry throat could not manage it. Other hoarse, cracked voices took up the song:

*What the soldier wanted,
She only waited for the drum,
Till it came a-drumming,
Till it came...*

The words mingled incongruously with "Whither have you gone, you golden days of spring?..."

"Look, there's our *batko*!"

All turned their heads to look. Yes, there he was, unchanged, stocky, sturdy, his battered grimy straw hat making him look like a mushroom. He watched them. One could see his hairy chest through the rents in his sweat-sodden tunic. His trousers were in rags and his blistered feet almost bare.

"Boys, our *batko* is like a bandit. If you met him in the forest, you'd run away, from him!"

They gazed at him lovingly and laughed.

He watched the ragged, weary, noisy crowd as it passed him, and his small observant eyes shone blue in his grim face.

"They're just a horde," he thought. "If the Cossacks attacked us now, all would be lost. They're just a horde!"

*Whither have you gone,
You golden days of spring?...*

“What’s that? What’s that?” The crowd began anxiously to ask, forgetting all about “housewife” and the “golden days of spring”.

They were silent, only the tramping of feet was heard; all heads turned, all eyes gazing in the one direction, towards the straight line of the telegraph posts which dwindled into the distance, the last of them being no taller than pencils. From the four nearest posts four naked men were hanging. The air around them was black with flies. Their heads were bent low, as if they were pressing down with their youthful chins the nooses that had strangled them; their teeth were bare, the empty sockets of their eyes, which the ravens had pecked out, were black. From their bellies, also pecked and torn, the greenish and slimy entrails hung. The sun glared. The skin on their sides was torn and bore black scars where they had been scourged with ramrods. At the approach of the crowd the ravens flew off a little and alighted on the tops of the posts, looking down sideways.

Four men ... and there was a fifth figure, naked, that of a girl, the breasts cut off and the body already turned black.

“Regiment, halt!”

To the first post a sheet of white paper had been nailed.

“Battalion, halt!”

“Company, halt!”

The order was passed along the whole column, its resonance dying out in the distance.

From those five descended silence and the faintly sweet smell of putrefaction.

Kozhukh took off his battered hat. Those who possessed hats also doffed them. Those who were hatless removed the protecting straw, grass, or twigs rolled about their heads.

The sun glared.

The faintly sweet, nauseating smell became palpable.

“Comrade, give me that,” said Kozhukh.

The aide tore off the sheet of white paper nailed beside one of the dead men and handed it to him.

Kozhukh clenched his jaws and spoke, flourishing the paper.

“Comrades, this is what the general wished to convey to you. General Pokrovsky writes: ‘All persons guilty of having any kind of intercourse with the Bolsheviks shall be as

ruthlessly executed as these five scoundrels from the Maikop works.’” He clamped his jaws shut. After a short pause he added, “Your brothers ... and your sister...”

Here he shut his mouth upon the words that he would have uttered. Words, he felt, would be useless.

Thousands of fevered eyes stared unblinkingly. A single heart, superhumanly huge, was beating loudly.

From the empty eye-sockets black drops were falling.

The fetid stench floated in the air.

The ringing in the torrid air, the buzzing of the swarms of flies gave way to stillness. Graveyard stillness and the fetid smell. Black drops kept falling.

“Fall in! March!”

The pounding of heavy feet broke the silence; it filled the torrid day with a new rhythm that was like the advance of a solitary man of inconceivable height and immeasurable weight and the beating of a superhumanly big heart.

They marched unaware of the quickening in their heavy resounding steps, unaware that they were marching with a swing. The sun glared down cruelly.

In the first platoon a man with a little black moustache staggered, dropped his rifle and fell down heavily. His purple face swelled, the veins in his neck became taut, and the pupils of his eyes rolled up under his open eyelids exposing red balls. The sun stared down at him.

Nobody stopped, nobody slackened his pace—all went on, still more swingingly, as though in a hurry, looking ahead with shining eyes, looking into the torrid, rippling distance.

“Stretchers!”

A gig drove up, and the man was lifted into it. The sun had killed him.

Presently another man fell, then two others.

“Stretchers!”

Then came the command.

“Cover your heads!”

Those who had hats put them on. Some opened ladies’ parasols. Those who had nothing snatched handfuls of dry grass as they went and improvised some sort of head covering. Without stopping they tore from their bodies their sweaty tattered clothes, gritty with dust, slipped off their trousers, tore them to pieces, made kerchiefs of them, tying them around their heads as women do, and marched on, with

mighty swinging strides, devouring the highroad that stretched under their bare feet.

Kozhukh wanted to catch up with the van of the column in his britzka. The driver, his eyes popping out lobster-fashion from excessive heat, whipped the horses, leaving sweaty stripes across their cruppers. The foam-flecked animals broke into a trot but to no avail—the ponderous ranks went ever faster and with a greater swing.

“They must be mad. Scampering like hares!”

He lashed his spent horses anew and jerked at the reins.

Fine, my lads, fine! Kozhukh thought, looking at them from under his heavy brows, his eyes the colour of blue steel. At that rate we’ll make seventy versts a day.

He got down and marched, straining every muscle not to lag behind the others and was soon lost in the briskly marching endless ranks.

The telegraph posts, solitary and naked, disappeared into the distance. The head of the column turned to the right onto the highroad and was once more enveloped in its stifling clouds of dust. One could see nothing. The heavy, rhythmical, measured beat of footsteps filled the smothering clouds that rolled hurriedly forward.

To those first gruesome telegraph posts other units came up in turns. Each halted.

The stillness of the grave likewise fell upon them. The commanders read out the general’s paper. Thousands of fevered eyes stared unblinkingly. A single heart, superhumanly huge, began to beat.

Those five up there, motionless. Under the nooses their black flesh decomposed, the bones showing white.

On the tops of the posts the ravens look sideways with shining eyes. The air is permeated with the heavy, sweet, nauseating smell of roasted flesh.

The measured tramp of the feet of those other units likewise beats faster and faster. Unconsciously, without awaiting a command, they, too, fell into serried ranks and marched on, their heads bare, seeing no longer the telegraph posts that stretched so orderly in the distance, heedless of the short, sharply black noon shadows, fixing their eyes ahead on the remote torrid shimmer.

Then came the command: “Cover your heads!”

They marched quicker and quicker, ever more swingingly in

solid ranks, turning to the right and pouring themselves back into the highroad, being again swallowed in clouds of dust that rolled on together with them.

Thousands, tens of thousands, passed. There were no longer any platoons, companies, battalions or regiments, there was one huge, motley mass. It moved with numberless steps, looked with countless eyes, beat with one immense heart.

And all as one man kept their unwavering glance fixed on the torrid distance.

Long slanting shadows fell. A blue mist blurred the mountains. The weary sun, no longer fierce, had sunk behind them. The carts, open or hooded, full of children and wounded, dragged heavily on.

They were stopped for a minute and told:

“Your own kith and kin... See what the general did...”

They moved on, and nothing but the creaking of wheels was to be heard. The children asked in frightened whispers:

“Mamma, will the dead come to us in the night?”

The women crossed themselves, blew their noses in their skirts, wiped their eyes, and said:

“Poor lads, poor girl!”

Old people walked beside the carts. Everything became uncertain. There were telegraph posts no longer; instead in the darkness stood huge pillars supporting the sky. And the entire sky broke into innumerable twinklings, but it did not send down more light. It seemed as if the mountains were back again; but, in truth, these were only hills, the great peaks having already been screened away by the night; and all around one felt the expanding of the unknown, mysterious plain on which anything might happen.

And suddenly a woman shrieked so loudly that the stars seemed to shy away to one side of the sky.

“Oh, oh, oh, what have they done to them... The beasts ... the madmen! Help! Kind people, look at them!”

She clutched a post, embraced the cold feet, pressed against them the young tresses of her dishevelled hair.

Strong hands forced her from the post and dragged her to a cart. She twisted herself free, rushed again to embrace the putrid corpses and again shrieked out in the mad night.

“Where is your mother? Where are your sisters? Did you

not wish to live? Where are your clear eyes, your strength, your living speech? Oh, you poor creatures, you unfortunates! There is nobody to mourn by you, nobody to sorrow over you, nobody's tears to fall upon your bodies..."

Again people held her, again she writhed free and shrieked in the mad night:

"What have they done... They've eaten my son! They have eaten my Stepan, they have eaten you! Devour us all at once, blood and flesh, devour us, and choke, fill your bellies with human flesh, bones, eyes, and brains..."

"Come on, stop that!"

The carts creaked on. Her cart also had moved away. Other people seized her, but she tore herself free from them, and again her screams rent the mad night.

Only the rear-guard, when passing, overpowered her. They tied her to the last cart, and moved on.

And behind them was desolation and the smell of putrefaction.

D. Furmanov

(b. 1891, village of Sereda, now the town of
Furmanov
near Ivanovo—d. 1926, Moscow)

Dmitry Furmanov's early death was a serious loss to Soviet literature. He had only just started out as a writer when meningitis literally carried him away within the hour.

A stretcher-bearer in the First World War, upon his return to the big industrial centre of Ivanovo-Voznesensk Furmanov for some time was involved with the anarchists and other leftist parties, but he soon became disillusioned with them. In July 1918, he joined the Communist Party on the recommendation of Mikhail Frunze, a prominent member of the Bolshevik Party who became a brilliant military leader during the Civil War. Furmanov was commissar of Vassili Chapayev's legendary division, fought in the hottest eastern and southern sectors in the Civil War, was decorated with the Order of the Red Banner for his part in a daring landing operation carried out under another legendary Civil War commander Kov-

tukh who, as Kozhukh, was to be portrayed by Alexander Serafimovich in his epic *THE IRON FLOOD*.

Furmanov wrote several works before his premature death; but the most important of all was the historical documentary novel Chapayev, which immortalised his own name as well as Chapayev's.

Who was Vasili Chapayev? He was a soldier of fantastic bravery and a general with a fantastic hold over the rank-and-file mass of peasants and Cossacks from whom he emerged. Chapayev was a natural military genius. He had a fiery revolutionary spirit, a feeling of intense class hatred for the forces that had plunged the young republic into an internecine war, together with a hot-headness that verged on downright insubordination and a disrespect for the "brass-hats", whom Chapayev somehow associated with the old regime. And it was to Chapayev's division that the young Communist Dmitry Furmanov was sent as adviser.

Dmitry Furmanov's documentary and confessional novel Chapayev tells how relations developed between the commander and the commissar.

It would, however, be a serious mistake to treat this work solely as a documentary novel about certain people and events. Chapayev contains generalisations covering a wide range of historical material. It gives a full picture of how ideology and conscious discipline were fused into a single alloy with the elemental revolutionary

*feelings of the masses and their
unconstrained love of freedom. This is
a story about a whole era in the life of
the Soviet republic.*

Chapayev

(*An excerpt*)

Early in the morning, at about five or six o'clock, someone knocked loudly on Fyodor's door. He opened it—a stranger was standing there.

"Hullo! I'm Chapayev."

Fyodor was wide awake at once. He quickly looked Chapayev in the face, and held out his hand, too hurriedly somehow, trying hard to remain calm.

"My name's Klichkov. Just arrived?"

"Just come from the station—my fellows are there—I sent horses for them."

Fyodor quickly ran over him with greedy eyes—he was impatient to see everything about him and understand all of him. In just this way, at the front on a dark night, a search-light on the hunt nervously jabs into every crack, trying to drive the darkness out of corners and expose the shrinking nakedness of the earth.

"An ordinary-looking man, thin, of middle height, apparently not very strong, and with slender, almost feminine hands; his thin, brown hair is stuck down on his forehead in strands. His nose is short, thin and sensitive. His brows are thin and straight, his lips thin, his teeth shining white; he is clean-shaven except for a big sergeant-major moustache. His eyes are light blue, almost green; they are quick, intelligent, unwinking. His complexion is fresh and clear, without pimples or wrinkles. He was wearing a khaki tunic, blue trousers and high doe-skin boots, and was holding a cap with a red band in his hand; he was wearing shoulder-belts, and at his side was a revolver. His silver sword and green jacket were thrown on the trunk." That is how Fyodor described Chapayev in his diary that evening.

Chapayev, though after the road, refused to have tea. He talked standing, and sent an orderly to the Brigade Commander to tell him to go to Staff Headquarters, where he, Chapayev, would follow. Soon the lads who had come with him burst into the room in a noisy crowd; they chucked their things into all the corners; threw caps, gloves, and belts on to the tables, chairs and windowsills; they threw down their revolvers, while some unhooked hand grenades and carelessly

stuck them in among the weathered caps and gloves. Sunburnt, stern-looking masculine faces; deep, gruff voices; clumsy, crude movements and speech—awkwardly and fortuitously structured, but forceful and convincing. Some of them had a way of speaking so strange that one might think that they were always quarrelling—they would jerk out a question abruptly, and answer as sharply, almost fiercely; they flung things around.

The whole house rumbled with their talk and their arguments—the new arrivals were spreading into all the rooms with the exception of Yozhikov's, which was locked.

Within two minutes, Fyodor saw one of the guests sprawl on his unmade bed, and hoist his legs up against the wall; then he began to smoke, flicking the ash off to one side, doing his best to make it fall on Klichkov's suitcase which was standing beside the bed. Another leaned his full weight on the frail dressing table, which groaned, cracked, and tottered. Somebody knocked a pane out of the window with his revolver butt, while somebody else put his stinking sheepskin coat on top of the bread on the table, so that when they came to eat it, it smelled vilely.

Along with this mob, seemingly even long before it, strong, robust, noisy talk burst into the room. It never died down for a minute and never got any louder—a steady drone of voices. This was the ordinary, normal conversation of these simple people from the steppe. Just try to make out who was in command here, and who subordinate! There wasn't a hint to go by—they all talked in the manner peculiar to themselves; their behaviour was equally rough, their language original, colourful, permeated with sound steppe simplicity. One family! But there was no visible attachment of one member for another, nor any consideration, any mutual concern, in even the veriest trifles—nothing whatever. At the same time one saw and felt that this was a single, strongly-knit bunch of people, only bound together by ties that were out of the ordinary and finding expression in an original form. They were knit together by their hazardous soldier's life; they were drawn together by bravery, personal courage, contempt for privation and danger, by loyal, unchanging solidarity and a readiness to help one another out of a tight place—by all their hard and colourful life spent together, shoulder to shoulder on the march and in battle.

Chapayev stood out among the others. He had absorbed a little culture—he didn't look so primitive, and didn't behave like the rest. It was as if he were holding himself in rein. The others also bore themselves rather differently towards him—it reminded one somewhat of the way a fly crawls up a windowpane: the fly keeps crawling confidently along; it runs into other flies and hops over them, or crawls over them, or they bump together and fly away in different directions; and then, suddenly, it runs into a wasp, and lo!—a flash, and it has flown away! It was the same with the Chapayev lads—so long as they were associating among themselves, they were absolutely free and easy; they would blurt out anything that came into their heads; one might give another a wallop with his cap, or a wooden spoon, or a kick with boot, or splash him with hot water from his glass. But as soon as Chapayev appeared in their way, none of these liberties were taken with him. Not from fear, not from some feeling of inequality, but from a particular sort of respect—it was as though they said: although he's ours, he's in a class by himself, and it's not for just anyone to set himself up as his equal.

This made itself felt constantly. No matter how free and easy the others held themselves in Chapayev's presence, no matter how much noise they made or how lustily they swore, as soon as things touched him the picture changed immediately. That was their way of showing their love and respect for him.

"Petka! Off with you to the commandant's!" Chapayev ordered.

Petka, a thin swarthy little fellow who was Chapayev's "aide", jumped up and without a word made for the door.

"I'm leaving in two hours—see that the horses are ready. Send mounted men ahead—Potapov and me'll go in a sleigh—get a move on! Potapov, you come with me!"

Chapayev imperiously jerked his head in the direction of a stoop-shouldered, sallow-skinned fellow. The chap was about thirty-five; he had kindly, laughing grey eyes, but his voice was as harsh as a raven's croak. It was strange to see his powerful, thick-set body move with a soft and girlish grace.

Potapov had apparently been in the middle of telling something very funny but no sooner did he hear Chapayev than he at once became sober. The smile in his grey eyes went out like a candle; he looked Chapayev seriously in the

eye with an answering glance that clearly said: "I've heard you!"

Then Chapayev went on with his orders:

"Nobody else except Potapov! The commissar here'll go too, and send three men on horses. The rest of you follow us to Talovka—don't drive the horses for nothing. Be there by evening!"

"Listen—" Chapayev looked round the room, not seeing the one he wanted. "Oh, yes—I've sent him there already—Well, you, Kochnev, go take a look at Headquarters—if everybody's gathered, come back and let me know."

Kochnev left the room. To Fyodor, he looked like a gymnast—he was so quick, so light on his feet, so agile and wiry. He was wearing a padded jacket short in the sleeves; a diminutive cap was stuck on the back of his head; he had boots on with puttees to his knees. He was not yet thirty, but his forehead was all in wrinkles. His eyes were light-grey and shrewd; his nose was broad and damp and he had a way of sniffing with it and twisting it sily to one side. He had enormous white wolfish teeth, and when he smiled, he drew back his lips as though ready to tear something to pieces.

There was also a chap named Chekov. He had conspicuous thick red eyebrows, a bushy fiery-red moustache, a crocodile jaw and Mongol cheekbones. His lower lip hung down like a leech distended with blood. His square, cast-iron jaw was thrust out aggressively, and above it, like a mushroom in an iron kettle, was his nose—sweaty and porous. Below the red matting that he had for eyebrows, his eyes glowed like live coals. He had a broad barrel chest, and his heavy hands were like shovels. He was a trifle over forty.

Ilya Tyotkin made busy with the tea-kettles, cut bread, cracking jokes incessantly and laughing at them himself—he made digs at everyone and had an answer ready for everything. A house-painter by trade, he had distinguished himself as a Red Guard; he was good-natured, always laughing and a favourite with everybody, a great one for songs, and games and tomfoolery. He was a little older than Petka—somewhere between twenty-six and twenty-eight.

Vikhor, a dashing cavalryman and the intrepid commander of the mounted scouts, stood beside Tyotkin patiently waiting for his share of bread. He had lost the little finger on his left hand—a target for much joking:

"Vikhor, punch him with your little finger, you four-fingered old ass!"

"Show us your little finger, and I'll give you a fag."

"You nine-fingered blockhead. You nine-legged cur!"

It was hard to get under Vikhor's skin—he was made that way, and was always that way even in battle. That man could do a lot without talking!

The most shoving, the worst swearing and the loudest noise came from Shmarin, the oldest of them all—a man of almost fifty. He was wearing a sheepskin jacket and felt boots because he was ill and was always cold. His voice was as hoarse as Potapov's, and he was black-eyed, black-haired and swarthy.

Averka, the coachman, just a youngster, was here with the rest of them—leaning on his whip and missing nothing of the preparations being made for tea and something to eat. Averka had a livid red face and an onion for nose. He was bleary-eyed from the frost and his lips were chapped and cracked. A scarf was wound around his neck—he never parted with it, even when he slept.

Of the orderlies, Alexei was the most permanent and the favourite. He was a very smart and resourceful chap. When anything was needed they sent Alexei—he would hunt it out and get everything ready. If food was needed, or a linch-pin for a cart, or a strap for a saddle, or home-made medicine, they never sent anyone but Alexei, the shrewdest lad you could find.

What a motley company they were! Each was a type in itself—you could sit down and write out a whole epic of the steppe using him for inspiration. No two of them were alike, as no two stones are alike. But all of them together were a single, devil-may-care clan. One family! And what a family!

Kochnev came in:

"The Brigade Commander is at Headquarters—you can go now."

There was slight rustle in the room—more than one pair of curious eyes were fixed on Chapayev.

"Let's go!"

Chapayev nodded to Potapov, and poked at Shmarin and Vikhor with a finger. They went out, spurs ringing and tramping heavily in their iron-rimmed heels. Fyodor went with them. It seemed to him that Chapayev was paying too little

attention to him and was putting him on the same level as his "suite". Born of these suspicions, an unhealthy little fear was lurking deep in him somewhere, and he recalled what people said about Chapayev: that in 1918, when he and his men had been surrounded, a commissar had lost his nerve, and Chapayev had given him a lashing with his whip. Fyodor recalled this, and felt bad. He knew that it could all have been invented; it could have been exaggerated or coloured up. But still there might be something in it—those were different times and Chapayev himself was different, and then you don't know what that commissar was like. Fyodor walked behind, and that fact in itself was unpleasant.

Chapayev greeted the Brigade Commander curtly and abruptly, looking aside the while, but the latter gallantly bowed double, clicked his spurs, and drawing himself up, almost fired a report at him. He had heard a lot about Chapayev, but mostly from the bad side, making him out to be little more than a ruffian, or at best a little cracked; he had heard nothing to show that Chapayev had really done anything worth while and did not believe the rumours circulating in the steppe about Chapayev's heroism.

Curious heads were peering out from all doors, the way the household at some merchant's home peep out through all the cracks when a distinguished guest arrives. It was apparent that it was not only the Brigade Commander that had heard horrors of all kinds about Chapayev. Today, Headquarters was unusually clean. Everyone was sitting or standing in his place. Preparations had been made to put on the best front possible—perhaps they were also afraid, not knowing how Chapayev might take things. When the newcomers came into the office of the Brigade Commander, the latter spread out on the table an excellently drawn plan of the next day's attack. Chapayev picked it up, silently examined the fine draughtsmanship and put it back on the table. Then he pulled up a stool and sat down. Some of those who had come with him also sat down.

"Some compasses!"

They gave him a sorry-looking, rusty pair of compasses. He opened them up, jerked them this way and that—and wasn't satisfied.

"Vikhor, go to Averka and fetch mine out of my bag!"

In a couple of minutes Vikhor came back with the

compasses, and Chapayev began to measure out the plan with them. At first, he only worked on the plan, but then he pulled a map out of his pocket and began straddling up and down over it with his compasses. He kept asking about distances from one place to another, and whether the going was hard, about water, the baggage trains, the morning fogs, and steppe snow-storms.

Those sitting round kept silent. Only the Brigade Commander would put in a word from time to time, or answer a question. As Chapayev looked at the map, the thin lines were transformed in his mind's eye into snowy valleys, burned-out villages, skirmish lines advancing in the dusk, columns of troops and crawling baggage trains; in his ears the cold morning wind roared and whistled; before his eyes flashed hillocks, well-sweeps, frozen blue streamlets, broken-down grey bridges and stunted bushes.

Chapayev was going into attack!

When he had finished measuring, Chapayev showed the Brigade Commander where there were mistakes: here the march was too long; there the place for a halt was badly chosen; here they would have to set out too early; there, they would arrive too late. All his arguments were backed up by notes he had made while measuring. The Brigade Commander was not too ready to agree with him, and seemed secretly amused at times. Still, he assented, made notes and altered the plan. On some points Chapayev would turn to Vikhor or Potapov or Shmarin, as though enlisting their sympathy and support:

"Well, and what d'you say about it? What d'you think? Am I right or wrong, I ask you?"

The men weren't used to holding forth much in his presence, and besides, there wasn't much that they could have added, so exactly and in such detail did Chapayev always provide for everything. They had even altered the old proverb to fit Chapayev: "Don't ever bother Chapayev. With him one head is better than two."

This new proverb they thought up specially for him. And very fitting it was, too, because there had been occasions when he had listened to other people's advice, and had then regretted it, had sworn and cursed himself. Also, the men had not forgotten one "council", when in their impetuosity they had come out with all kinds of bunkum by way of advice.

Chapayev had listened and listened for a long time, even egging them on:

"Right, that's right—yes—good—I see—that's fine—"

The advisers had really believed that he agreed with them and approved of everything. However, when they had finished, he said:

"Well, and now here's what we shall do—spit on all the rubbish you've said and forget it. It's no good at all. Now listen to my orders!"

And he began speaking and everything came out entirely different and there wasn't a thing left of what they had been conferring about so long.

All three had been at that conference and remembered it well—now they were careful about making suggestions, and mostly kept silence, well knowing when and where they could talk and when it was better not to. "Sometimes," they thought, "it may be a good thing to give advice, that's true, but more often, one word can make a lot of trouble!"

Now they kept silent. Fyodor also was silent most of the time—he was still somewhat at sea in military matters and there were some points which he understood with difficulty or not at all. It was only months later that he became familiar with this battle lore and the front affairs in general, but now—why should they ask him, a muff of a civilian!

With his hands folded behind his back, he stood right up against the table and looked now at the map, now at the plan, with a very knowing air; he would knit his brows, or turn his head aside to cough, obviously fearing to disturb the business-like discussion. His expression was serious and calm. An outsider might think that he was an equal participant in the discussion. Long before meeting Chapayev, Fyodor had decided to establish a special, subtle and cautious system of relations with him: at first, he would avoid purely military discussions so as not to reveal his complete ignorance; instead, he would hold political discussions in which he, Fyodor, would unquestionably have the upper hand; he would try to draw him out, make him give his opinion on all matters, including intimate questions, personal peculiarities and details; he himself would talk more about science, education, general development—here Chapayev would listen more than talk. And then—then he, Fyodor, would show himself to be a brave soldier—it was absolutely necessary that he do this,

and as quickly as possible, otherwise everything would go to the dogs so far as Chapayev was concerned, and probably all the men also—without it no politics, knowledge or personal qualities would be of any use! When he had done this feeling-out—this preparatory work—and Chapayev had opened up a little so that he could be understood, then he, Fyodor, could attempt to become closer friends with him, but for the time being—for the time being he must be careful. He must make sure that his courtesy and consideration were not construed to be fawning upon a “hero” and accepted as such! (Chapayev, of course, knew that his fame resounded everywhere, and that many would be flattered to scrape an acquaintance with him.) Only when Chapayev was “intellectually captured”, when he began to listen to Fyodor, and perhaps, to learn something from him, only then would he, Fyodor, be able to meet him halfway in everything. But no putting on airs—not for anything! He must immediately put simplicity, heartiness and a certain rudeness at the basis of their relations so that Chapayev wouldn’t ever think of Fyodor as a lily-livered intellectual who at the front was always looked on with suspicion and unconcealed contempt.

All these preparations of Klichkov’s were by no means trifles—they helped him, in the simplest, quickest and surest manner, to make himself at home in the surroundings in which he had now begun to work, and, for the sake of this work, to become an organic part of them. He did not know yet, just what the limits of this “coming together” would be, but he understood very well that Chapayev and the Chapayev men—all this half-guerrilla mass, and the nature of their activities—was an exceedingly complicated phenomenon which one couldn’t afford to approach blindfold. Along with good qualities, there were also qualities which must be treated very cautiously and guarded against.

Just what was Chapayev? How did Klichkov picture Chapayev to himself, and why was it that in regard to him he conceived this special, subtle system of relations? Was this really necessary?

While working in the rear, Fyodor had of course heard and read a lot about the popular heroes who made a splash now at one front of the Civil War, now at another. When he looked closer he saw that the majority of them were from among the peasants and very few from the ranks of the city workers.

Worker heroes were always of a different brand. Having grown up in a large industrial centre, used as he was to seeing the broad, orderly, well-organised struggle of the weavers, Fyodor always looked somewhat askance at the half-anarchistic guerrilla undertakings of popular heroes like Chapayev. This did not prevent him from following their careers with the greatest attention, regarding them with the greatest respect and being most enthusiastic about their heroic exploits. But a feeling of apprehension always remained with him. Such was the case now too.

"Chapayev is a hero," Fyodor reasoned to himself. "He personifies all that is irrepressible and spontaneous, all the wrath and protest that has accumulated within the peasantry. But the devil knows how such spontaneous elements may manifest themselves. We have had cases (not too few either) when just such a fine commander as Chapayev would suddenly go and shoot his commissar! And not some rogue, blabbermouth or coward, but a fine, brave revolutionary! And it even happened that they went over to the Whites with their 'spontaneous' bands.

"The workers—that's a different matter: *they'll never go over under any circumstances whatsoever*, that is, those of them that entered the struggle consciously. It is of course obvious that there are also people among the workers who were peasants yesterday, but there are those who are not class-conscious enough, and there are those who are too 'conscious' and have become tenderfeet; but with the workers, nevertheless, one sees at once where one stands.

"But—ah, how much there is that's dangerous in this Chapayev's guerrilla fire-eating bravery!"

It was because of his suspicious attitude towards this spontaneous guerrilla element that Fyodor decided to establish his relations with his new surroundings in the most subtle way—to establish them in such a way that he himself would not be swallowed up, but on the contrary, would exert an ideological influence on everything. It was best to begin with the head—to begin with Chapayev, the leader. It was on him that Fyodor concentrated all his attention.

Petka—as almost everyone was accustomed to calling Isayev—stuck his tiny bird-like head in at the door, and beckoning Potapov with his little finger, shoved a note at him, which read:

"Tell Vasily Ivanovich the hosses and ivrithin is reddy."

Petka knew that at certain times and in certain places, he couldn't just burst in, and on such occasions he always made use of such notes. The note came just in time. Everything had been said, written down, signed—now the order of the day would fly the rounds of the regiments. The formalities of taking charge of the operations occupied but little time.

"I came here to command," Chapayev declared, "and not to mess with papers—for that there's clerks."

"Vasily Ivanovich," Potapov whispered, "I see you're through—everything's ready—we can start."

"Everything ready? Let's go!" Chapayev abruptly rose from his stool. Everybody made way for him, and he went out first as he had come in.

A crowd of Red Army men had gathered around the porch—they had heard about Chapayev's arrival. Many had fought with him back in 1918; many were personally acquainted with him, and of course every last one had heard about him. They stood stretching out their necks, their eyes full of wonder and delight; their ingratiating smiles stretching to their ears.

"Hurrah for Chapayev!" shouted someone in front, just as Chapayev stepped on to the ground.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

From all sides, Red Army men came running up; the villagers approached; the crowd grew.

"Comrades!" said Chapayev.

There was instant silence.

"I've no time to talk to you now—I'm on my way to the front-lines. Tomorrow we'll see each other there because we've got a good appetiser ready for the Cossacks and tomorrow we'll give them a treat. We'll have a talk then, but right now—so long!"

Again there was a thunder of cheers. Chapayev got into the sleigh. Potapov squeezed in beside him. Three mounted men were waiting. A spirited black stallion was led up for Fyodor.

"Get going!" shouted Chapayev.

The horses gave a jerk—the crowd made way, shouting the louder. They rode between two lines of cheering Red Army men all the way to the edge of Algai.

The snowy desert of the steppe was monotonous and dreary. During the warm days, the hillocks had got bald—the

ground had begun to show through, but now they had again been snowed under; the whole steppe was covered over and was crunchy from the frost. The horses trotted along easily and gayly. Chapayev and Potapov sat almost back to back. One might think they had quarrelled, but they were thinking over the coming action, preparing themselves for the next day. The three mounted horsemen kept three or four paces behind the sleigh, no closer, no farther away, but always at the same distance as though chained there. Fyodor rode at one side. At times he would let the others get a whole verst ahead of him and then put his horse into a gallop. It was good to gallop over the steppe, the horse was so light in his stride and so willing to go.

"Tomorrow," he thought, riding along at a rolling trot, "will mark the beginning of my life as a soldier, the beginning of real life for me. It will get going, for how long, I wonder. Who can know what the fate has in store? Who can name the day of victory? When will it come, our victory? Day after day will gallop by on the march, in battle, in danger and alarm.... Will we, wisps of down, be preserved? Who of us will return to his native place, and who will be left here in the dark gullies, in the snowy wastes of the steppe?"

And memories of everyday affairs crept into his mind, and dear, familiar faces rose up before him. He pictured himself killed: he lay on the snow, his arms thrown wide, his temple bloody. He even began to be sorry for himself. Once this feeling of self-pity would have been sure to turn into a protracted fit of melancholy, but now he shook it off, drove the thought away and rode on composedly—he had laughed away the thought of his death.

Two and a half hours passed in this way. Chapai¹ evidently got tired of sitting still; he stopped the sleigh, put one of the riders in his seat, and himself rode horseback. He rode up to Fyodor.

"So now we'll be together, Comrade Commissar?"

"Yes," answered Fyodor and at once noticed how firmly and solidly Chapayev sat in the saddle, as though welded there. Then he glanced down at himself and it seemed as if he was tied on.

¹ Chapayev's close friends often called him "Chapai".—*Ed.*

"A good bump," he thought, "and I'll fly out of the saddle. Just take a look at Chapayev there—nothing'll loosen him."

"Been fighting long?"

It seemed to Fyodor that the other was grinning and he caught a note of irony in his voice. "He knows that I've only just come to the front, and is making fun of me."

"I'm just beginning."

"Been in the rear up to now?"

Again the question was sarcastic.

One must know that for such soldiers as Chapayev, people in the rear were the most contemptible and despicable of creatures. Fyodor had suspected this before, and during the last few weeks he had become fully convinced of it in travelling and talking with many a soldier and commander.

"In the rear, you ask? I was working in Ivanovo-Voznesensk," Fyodor carelessly dropped in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Way beyond Moscow?"

"Yes, three hundred versts at least."

"Well, and what's it like there? How're things getting along?"

Fyodor was glad to change the subject and eagerly grasped at the last question; he told Chapai what a hard and hungry life was the Ivanovo-Voznesensk weavers'. Why weavers? Were there only weavers there? It was always that way with Klichkov—when he talked about Ivanovo-Voznesensk, he saw before him only the host of workers, and was proud of the fact that he was close to this host; in his recollections he even posed a little.

"So life is hard for them," Chapayev agreed seriously, "and all because there's not enough food. If they had food—why, everything would go different—and they stuff themselves, the sons-of-bitches, you can be sure they don't think of those—"

"Who stuff themselves?" Fyodor asked, not understanding him.

"The Cossacks—they don't give a damn about anything."

"Yes, but all the Cossacks aren't like that."

"All of them!" shouted Chapayev. "You don't know, but I tell you, all of them! And don't you tell me otherwise—n-no!" and Chapayev bounced nervously in his saddle.

"They can't all be like that," Fyodor protested. "Maybe just a few, but there are Cossacks who're for us. Why, wait a

minute—" and he recollected something with joyful agitation, "what about our mounted scouts in the brigade, aren't they all Cossacks?"

"In the brigade?" Chapayev became just a little thoughtful.

"Why, yes, with us, here, in the brigade."

"They must be from the city—I doubt it could be any from around here," Chapayev persisted.

"I don't know whether they're from the city, but they're here, and it can't be, Comrade Chapayev, that all the Cossacks, every single one, is against us. It simply can't be that way."

"Why not? You stay a little with us, and—"

"No matter how long I stay—I'd still never believe it," Fyodor's voice was hard and stern.

"As for single people, why talk about them?" Chapayev began to back down a little. "Of course there's one here and one there, but not many—hardly any at all."

"No, not individuals, you're wrong there—they're writing from Turkestan—Cossack regiments there have set up Soviet power over a whole region—and in the Ukraine, and on the Don."

"Well, go on hoping, they'll show you—"

"Why hope—I'm not hoping," Klichkov explained to Chapayev. "There's a lot of truth in your opinion. It's true that the Cossacks are a bunch of vultures. Who can argue about that? The tsarist government did not lavish all that care on them for nothing. But you look at the young Cossacks—they're nothing like the old ones. The young ones come to us more. Of course, it's harder for some Cossack grey-beard to reconcile himself to Soviet government—at least it's hard now, until he has understood it. Why, the things they think about us, and they believe everything: they say, we are turning churches into cowsheds, our wives are all in common, we force everybody to live together, make them eat and drink together, and it has to be at one table. How can a Cossack reconcile himself to that when he's been used to the Church from generation to generation—used to having plenty of everything on his fat farm, used to having other people work for him, and used to a free steppe life?"

"Exploiters," said Chapayev, getting the word out with difficulty.

"Exactly," said Fyodor, repressing, a smile. "Exploitation is

at the bottom of it. The rich Cossacks not only exploit the Kirghiz and Russians who don't happen to be Cossacks—they're not above exploiting their own Cossacks. That's where they begin to split up. Only the old people, even when they get the worst of it, have reconciled themselves to it—they say that it's God's way. The young people look at things simpler and bolder—that's why it's more the young people who come over to us. You can't change the old ones—the only way you can convince them is with a gun."

"A gun is right, of course—" Chapayev said shaking his head, "but fighting's hard. If it weren't for—"

Fyodor didn't understand why Chapai said this, but realised that he hadn't said it for nothing—that something special was to be read into these words. He waited for the other to develop or explain his thought.

"Our centres—that's what—" Chapayev again dropped an obscure but tempting phrase.

"What centres?"

"Why, they've stuck in all kinds of bastards there," Chapayev muttered seemingly to himself but loud enough for Fyodor to hear everything distinctly. "The son-of-a-bitch used to keep me at sentry duty for all of a day, and when it was freezing cold too, and now they welcome him with open arms: 'Here's a soft chair for you, General—sit down, please. Command any way you like—you needn't give them any ammunition if you don't want to—let them fight with sticks.'"

Chapayev had got on to his sorest point—the question of staffs, generals, orders and court-martial for their non-fulfilment—a question which in those days touched to the quick not only Chapayev and not only people like Chapayev.

"You can't get along without generals," muttered Klichkov in a soothing tone. "How could you fight without generals?"

"We'd get along without them." Chapayev gripped the reins tightly.

"We couldn't get along without them, Comrade Chapayev. You can't do much with just daring—we need knowledge and what knowledge have we got? Who'll give us knowledge except the generals? They've studied all that and they've got to teach us. The time'll come when we'll have our own teachers, but we haven't got them yet, or have we? Of course not! And since we haven't, we'll have to learn from others!"

“Learn! Yes! But what will they teach us? What?” Chapayev objected hotly. “D’you think they’ll tell us what has to be done? Hot on your word! I was at their Academy myself—for two months I hung around there like a fish out of water, and then I chucked the whole business and came back here. Nothing for people like me to do there. One of them—Pechkin, his name was—a professor—bald as your knee he was—asked me at the examination:

“‘D’you know,’ he asks, ‘the Rhine River?’

“I’d been all through the German War—why shouldn’t I know it? Only I thought, why should I answer him?

“‘No,’ I says, ‘I don’t know, but do you know the Solyanka River?’

“He didn’t expect that, and opened his eyes wide.

“‘No I don’t,’ he says. ‘What about it?’

“‘Then there’s no use asking questions. I was wounded on the Solyanka River, and crossed it and recrossed it five times. What do I care about your Rhine, what the hell has I got to do with it? But on the Solyanka I’ve got to know every little bump of ground because that’s where we’re fighting the Cossacks!’”

Fyodor burst out laughing and looked at Chapayev in amazement. “What baby ideas this Chapayev, this popular hero, has! Each to his own calling it appears, some people can acquire knowledge, but for others it’s impossible. Here this fellow spent two months at the Academy and didn’t get a useful thing out of it, didn’t understand a thing. And he’s got brains—only he’s terribly raw—he’ll take a lot of polishing.”

“You weren’t at the Academy long enough,” said Fyodor. “You can’t learn everything in two months. It’s hard—”

“Might as well’ve not been there at all,” said Chapayev, with a hopeless gesture. “No need to teach me anything—I know all there is to know myself.”

“What d’you mean, no need to teach you,” Fyodor objected. “A person can always learn something new.”

“Yes, but not there!” Chapayev retorted excitedly. “I know there’s things to learn and I’m going to learn. I want to tell you.... What’s your name?”

“Klichkov.”

“I want to tell you, Comrade Klichkov, that I’m almost illiterate. I only learned to write four years ago, and I’m thirty-five years old! You might say I’ve lived in ignorance

my whole life. Well, why talk about it now—some other time. That must be Talovka, there.”

Chapayev spurred on his horse. Fyodor followed suit. They overtook Potapov. Ten minutes later they were entering Kazachya Talovka.

1923

V. Ivanov

(b. 1895, Lebyazhie near
Semipalatinsk—
d. 1963, Moscow)

Vsevolod Ivanov went out to work when still very young, earning his living as a shopkeeper's helper, a type-setter, a sailor on river boats, a loader, and a circus artist. His whole youth was spent in wanderings about Siberia, the Urals, and Kazakhstan. The sweet poison of wanting to appear in print came to him in 1915 and his first book ROGULKI was set and printed in 30 copies at the Omsk newspaper's printing shop by its own author in 1919.

The Civil War determined the thematic trend of Vsevolod Ivanov's work for the rest of his life. All the writer's most notable and successful writings, those that earned him his place in the history of Soviet literature, are about the Civil War. His novels THE PARTISANS (1921) and ARMOURED TRAIN 14-69 (1922) have become true classics.

In his portrayal of real events, Vsevolod Ivanov strove after highly expressive means, using a

colourful idiom, an elevated, romantic style, and exotic descriptions.

Vsevolod Ivanov along with a number of other highly talented writers early in the Soviet period was able to subject the amazing phenomenon of the Civil War to artistic analysis: that war for bright aims of a new society of class justice was fought by people whose own characters were scarred by the dark world which they were fighting arms in hand.

Vsevolod Ivanov's writings constitute one of the brightest chapters in the formation of Russian Soviet literature.

The Rushes

I

The sun in the rushes is as fat and speckled as a lama's festive robe, while the mire—a wet green slime—smells of carp.

My arms yearn to swim—under the rushes, through the mire—to cleave lazily through the thick and fresh-smelling water.

But I don't. This day I have given over entirely to my body and my arms should be allowed to lie calmly at my side in the grass.

Now a mosquito lands on my eyebrow: I feel how it spreads its little limbs, fine as cobwebs, and slowly inserts its proboscis into my flesh. I do not hinder him on this day. I close my sun-warmed eyelids and count how many times the blade of grass rustling by my ear touches my hair.

“Four... seven... Eight....”

If the number's even, they'll kill me; if it's not, I'll get away. A detachment from the ataman's forces is in the village, and the Cossack elder there has been ordered to hand me over. Is he going to?

“Twelve... thirteen... fifteen....”

What nonsense! The grass has stopped touching my hair but I don't believe in it.

“Sixteen!” I say to the blade of grass.

And I bend it down to my head. It is angered. It breaks.

The sapphire breast of a greenish loon cuts through the water as it swims out of a channel. It slowly lowers its navy blue beak into the water, the feathers on its neck ruffle up, its body judders greedily—it has found something.

At this point I chase the mosquito from my brow and watch lazily how, filled with my blood, it wobbles its red paunch as it flies.

Lazy and heavy waters flow through my veins. My heart swims in the distance—a fat green carp. My knees and my forehead—three porticos—have absorbed the most heat.

My thoughts follow one another, like monks with candles, slowly. Black-hooded forms fall in quick succession upon my arms, and moustached, sunburned faces chortle loudly. This happened as I thought about porticos.

I caress my knees and forehead. I laugh.

A lama in a speckled robe, looking like the sun in the rushes, once spoke to me in the ruins of Karakorum.

"The life of man is like the stones. The winds blow and only sand remains. Batyi and Tamerlane lived here. What do you want?"

I burst out laughing at the venerable lama, right in his thin lips.

"I am travelling with a single donkey and shall not be a Batyi or a Tamerlane but I have more love than you and more than them...."

The donkey placed its thin, dusty legs wide apart, stuck out its lip, and brayed. A dove-coloured fly sat on its lip throughout. The same fly was sitting on the lama's robe and on my shoulder.

Having drunk some milk, we went on, while the lama remained behind to ponder about Batyi, about Tamerlane, and about stones turned into sand.

Why had I remembered the lama?

I don't know. Perhaps the flecks of sunlight on the rushes reminded me of his coat.

A twig is pressing into my body from my shoulder to my elbow but I don't want to turn onto my back. The twig is rotten and by the time they will shout to me, I shall have crushed it. It has, I remember, pale grey bark with fine knots on it. Perhaps it is a silver birch twig. I recall the taste of cool birch sap—in spring it's delicious drunk through a straw. The ground is still cold, but a warm whipping wind bends the birch's neck; the trunk of the birch tree shakes from the very crown down to the black bark of its roots, trembles, giving up its sap. I go on to recall the birch pommel on my saddle and I laugh again.

"No, the ataman's men won't catch me!"

The sticky green dampness of grass on my palms clogs the paths that my life has taken. My hand is like a leaf and my fingers are like veins. At their roots are grey calluses made by reins. He who rides a lot knows whither he goes!

So the time passes. The water presses into the earth ever more heavily in its immobility. The rushes straighten, stretch upwards, their leaves rustling tensely. The fish rise from the bottom, surface. Their fins look like yellowish dust in the greenish water. It seems to me that I can see their sleepy,

muddy-red eyes. The fish swim towards the sun in order to wake themselves up. I lay the back of my head down in the warm ribbon of grass and my face turns to the sky. It is the same sky it was before I existed—and that, perhaps, is why I don't like to look at it. Here leaves are born every year for me and the earth, fertile and broad, loves me in its own way.

I watch again how the water swallows time. My hands stretch out to give the sleepy mire a broad, resounding slap—to make the fat fish flash in fear about the lake and to impress in their brains how small it, their kingdom, is.

Is it necessary?

Let us take it that today it isn't.

I lay my hand down in the grass and try to recognise its colour with my fingers. I close my eyes and I see in a clear flash: the soft, long, fragrant ribbon is green. Where it's narrower and harder the colour is greenish yellow. And this almost round object is red.

I open my eyes. A round red blade of grass.

That it's autumn must be taken into account. I hold the round red blade of grass in my fingers. I break it and speak.

"Autumn."

The rushes are growing darker. They are like threads joining the clouds and the earth. They are like a partition hiding the master, a partition in a large tent.

My body gets tired. I walk down to the water and wash. Quiet drops, viscid as honey, fall from my hands and are slowly sucked in by the lake.

A whistle comes from the rushes. A broad hoof is smacking down resoundingly on the hummocks. I lower my jaw, my mouth tenses, and my lips shape themselves to whistle.

"Ssssss...ssss."

Someone hawks in the rushes. Gently rustling the leaves with its wing, a bird takes off over my head. A man laughs.

"May you rot in hell!"

I remember the twig on which I was lying. I crush it under my heel.

"Is that you, Lukyan?"

"Yes, lad, it's me. The bird, damn its eyes, grazed my face with its tail. Well, how about you?"

"Ready."

He leans forward and, brushing the mane away, slaps the

horse's sweaty neck. He wipes the sweat off on the top of his boot and continues:

"Climb up behind me. They're looking hard for you and they'll kill you if they find you. Over there, a little way off, I've left a horse. You'll ride to the village of Bikmetzhanki. Do you know it?"

"No. Where is it, this village? I don't know."

"Really? Cut straight across the steppe, towards the sun. You'll find it. Your people are all there, waiting."

II

Over the steppe—towards the sun.

Over the steppe—to joy.

Over the steppe—advance.

We'll walk and ride over the steppe. We'll turn sand into stone and stone into grain.

May the ringing froth of my merry days come!

1921

Translated by David Sinclair-Loutit

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'B. Lavrenyov'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

(b. 1891, Kherson—d. 1959, Moscow)

The son of a teacher of literature, Boris Lavrenyov graduated from the Law Faculty of Moscow University in the first years of the First World War and went straight to the front from the lecture-room. The Civil War caused him much soul-searchings. He never forgot a conversation with his old father who, noticing his son's vacillations, told him that his place was always with the people, both in sorrow and in joy.

When the Civil War ended, Lavrenyov turned professional writer. His first short stories were full of revolutionary romanticism. They featured men from the very depths who had risen to struggle for the liberation of the working people, men of heroic character and revolutionary temperament.

Lavrenyov wrote many stories about the violent moral conflicts caused by the clash between revolutionary duty and the old moral standards. He wrote a drama "Break-Up" (1928), whose title re-

flects the deep split that ran through the entire fabric of Russian society during the Civil War. One of the most popular of his works is the story, "The Forty First" (1926), about a Civil War episode in Central Asia. A Red Army woman-soldier, Maryutka Basova, has been ordered to escort a whiteguard officer taken prisoner by a Red detachment. During a storm at sea, some of the detachment are drowned, but Maryutka and her prisoner are cast up on a small island. This is a familiar romantic setting: a young woman and a handsome young man who are attracted to each other in a Robinson Crusoe-type situation. However, forces come between these two which are much greater than their personal feelings—the acknowledged irreconcilability of the class goals for which they are fighting: the aristocrat, on the one hand, on the other, the woman of the people. He is motivated by the desire to keep his privileges for good and all; she—by a craving for freedom and a just life for all mankind...

Boris Lavrenyov expressed the heroism and tragedy of the Civil War with consummate artistry. The best of his works have become part of the treasure store of world as well as Soviet literature.

The Forty First

CHAPTER 6

Recording the second conversation and explaining
the harmful effects of sea bathing at a temperature
of 2 degrees above freezing-point

The lieutenant touched Maryutka on the shoulder. He tried to say something, but his teeth were chattering too violently. He thrust his fist under his jaw to stop its shaking.

"Crying won't help," he managed to get out. "We must move about. We'll freeze if we sit here."

Maryutka lifted her head.

"Where shall we move to?" she said hopelessly. "This is an island. Nothing but water all around."

"Even so we've got to move. We'll find a shed somewhere."

"How do you know? Was you ever here?"

"No, but when I was a schoolboy I read that the fishermen build sheds on this island to keep their catch in. We've got to find one of those sheds."

"And if we find one, what then?"

"We'll see in the morning. Get up, Friday."

Maryutka gave him a frightened look.

"God, the man's daft. What'll I do with him? It ain't Friday, handsome. It's Wednesday."

"That's all right; don't mind what I say. We'll discuss that later. Get up."

Maryutka got up obediently. The lieutenant stooped down to pick up the rifles, but she pushed his hand away.

"No fooling! You gave me your word you wouldn't make a dash for it."

The lieutenant withdrew his hand and went off into peals of hoarse, wild laughter.

"You're the one that's daft it seems, not me. Use your imagination, silly. How could I make a dash for it here? I just wanted to help you with the rifles. They're heavy."

Maryutka was reassured.

"Thanks for the help," she said softly and seriously. "But I've been ordered to deliver you to headquarters, so I can't let you have a gun."

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders and picked up the sacks. He walked ahead of her.

The sand, mixed with snow, crunched under their feet. There seemed to be no end to this low, sickeningly flat beach.

In the distance loomed something grey covered with snow. Maryutka staggered under the weight of three rifles.

"Cheer up, Maria Filatovna! We're almost there. That must be a shed."

"If only it is! I'm done in. And frozen stiff."

They ducked into the shed. It was black as ink inside and filled with a nauseating smell of dampness and salt fish.

"Fish! At least we won't starve to death."

"If only we had a light! If we could see, we might find a corner sheltered from the wind," groaned Maryutka.

"You can hardly expect to find electricity in a place like this."

"We could burn the fish. Look how oily they are."

The lieutenant laughed again.

"Burn the fish? You certainly *are* daft."

"Why?" said Maryutka testily. "Where I come from on the Volga we burnt as much as you like. Fish burn better than logs."

"It's the first time I ever heard that. But how will we set fire to them? I've got a flint, but what about chips..."

"Oh, you softy. Anyone can see you was brought up hanging on your mamma's skirts. Here, take these cartridges apart and I'll get some chips off the wall."

The lieutenant's fingers were so frozen he could hardly take apart three cartridges. Maryutka almost fell over him in the darkness as she came back with her chips.

"Sprinkle the gunpowder here. In a little pile. Let's have the flint."

They twisted a rag into a fuse, and it smouldered like a little orange eye in the darkness. Maryutka thrust it into the gunpowder. With a hiss, it burst into slow yellow flames, licking up the dry chips.

"It's burning!" cried Maryutka joyfully. "Bring some fish. Bring carp—they're the fattest."

They laid the fish in neat piles on the burning chips. It sizzled, then burst into bright, hot flames.

"All we've got to do is feed it now. There's enough fish to last six months."

Maryutka glanced about her. The flames threw dancing shadows on the enormous stacks of fish. The wooden walls of the shed were full of cracks and holes.

Maryutka went to inspect the shed.

"Here's a corner without any holes in the walls!" she called out suddenly. "Pile on the fish, don't let the fire go out! I'll clean out this place. We'll have a decent corner to live in."

The lieutenant sat down beside the fire, hunching his shoulders as the warmth crept into him. Swish! Flop! Maryutka was throwing the fish about in her corner.

"Everything's ready!" she called out at last. "Bring a light."

The lieutenant picked up a burning carp by the tail and went to look. Maryutka had made walls of fish on three sides, forming an open space about six feet square.

"Climb in and light another fire. I've laid some fish in the middle. Now I'll bring our supplies."

The lieutenant held the burning carp under the little pile of fish. Slowly, reluctantly, it caught fire. Maryutka came back, stood the rifles against the wall and threw down the sacks.

"Damn it all!" she exclaimed. "What did those two fellows have to go and get drowned for?"

"It would be a good idea to dry our clothes. We'll catch cold if we don't," the lieutenant said.

"Then why don't we? The fire's hot enough. We'll take them off and dry them."

The lieutenant squirmed.

"You dry yours first, Maria Filatovna. I'll go out and wait, then I'll dry mine."

Maryutka looked pityingly at his quivering face.

"You're a fool if there ever was one. A real *bourjui*. What are you scared of? Ain't you never seen a naked woman?"

"Oh, it's not that. I just thought you might not—"

"Bosh! We're all made of the same flesh and blood. Take your clothes off, idiot!" she almost shouted. "Your teeth's chattering like a machine-gun. A fine time I'm going to have with you, I can see that!"

Steam rose from the wet clothes hung over the rifles. Maryutka threw a leather jacket over her shoulders.

"Time to snooze. Maybe the storm will be over in the morning. We're lucky the boat didn't go to the bottom. If the

sea's calm we may be able to get as far as the Syr-Darya. We'll find fishermen there. Lie down, I'll watch the fire. Soon's I feel myself falling asleep I'll wake you up. We'll watch in turns."

The lieutenant put his clothes under him and covered himself with his coat. He tossed and groaned in his sleep. Maryutka watched him without moving. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"A nice how-d'ye-do!" she thought. "Sickly, he turns out. What if he's caught cold? I guess they kept him wrapped in velvet at home. Eh, what a life! A fish-pox on it!"

In the morning, when light glimmered through the chinks in the roof, Maryutka woke up the lieutenant.

"You watch the fire, hear? I'm going to run down to the beach. Maybe our fellows managed to swim to shore."

The lieutenant got up with difficulty.

"I've got a headache," he said dully, holding his head.

"That's natural—from the smoke and the tiredness. It'll pass. Take some hardtack out of the sack and fry yourself some fish."

She picked up her rifle, wiped it on her leather jacket, and went out.

The lieutenant crawled to the fire and took some sea-soaked hardtack out of the sack. He bit into it, chewed listlessly, dropped it, and collapsed on the floor beside the fire.

Maryutka shook the lieutenant by the shoulder.

"Get up! Get up, damn you! We're done for!"

The lieutenant's eyes opened wide and his lips parted.

"Get up, I tell you! We're in for it now! The boat's washed away! We're done for now!"

The lieutenant stared at her in silence.

Maryutka stared back, then gave a little gasp.

The lieutenant's ultramarine eyes were filmy and vacant. The cheek that dropped heavily against her hand was on fire.

"So you did catch cold, you gutless scarecrow! What am I going to do with you?"

The lieutenant's lips moved.

Maryutka bent down.

"Mikhail Ivanovich, don't give me a bad mark... I couldn't learn it... I'll have it ready tomorrow..."

"What're you raving about?" said Maryutka with a little start.

"Get it!... Grouse!" he suddenly shouted, raising himself up.

Maryutka shrank back and covered her face with her hands.

The lieutenant fell back again, digging his fingers into the sand, muttering incoherently.

Maryutka darted a despairing look at him. The next moment she had taken off her jacket and thrown it on the ground; with difficulty she dragged the limp body of the lieutenant on to it, covering him with his coat. Then she sank down in a sad little heap beside him, slow tears stealing down her hollow cheeks.

The lieutenant tossed as he lay, throwing off the coat, but Maryutka stubbornly replaced it and tucked it tightly up to his very chin. Whenever his head slipped down on to the floor she propped it up again. Rolling up her eyes, she addressed what must have been heaven:

"Maybe he'll die. What'll I tell Yevsukov then? Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear!"

She leaned over his burning body and looked into his filmy blue eyes.

A stab of pity pierced her heart. Reaching out, she gently stroked the curly hair that was matted from tossing. She took his head in her hands and murmured tenderly, "You blue-eyed silly, you!"

CHAPTER 7

**Which is baffling at the beginning,
but becomes clear in the end**

Silver trumpets with bells on them.

The trumpets sound, the bells tinkle softly, like ice:

"Ting-a-ling-a-ling!"

"Ding-a-ling-a-ling!"

"Toot-toot, toot-toot!" blare the trumpets.

A march. No question about it—a march. The march that is always played during dress parades.

And the same square, spattered with sun falling through the green silk of the maples.

The band-master is leading the band. He is standing with his back to the band, and through the slit in his greatcoat his

tail sticks out—a big red fox tail—and at the end of his tail there is a gold ball, and in the gold ball there is a tuning-fork.

The tail waves from side to side, the fork gives the instruments their key and shows the cornets and trombones when to join in, and whenever a musician yawns he gets a rap on the forehead with it.

The musicians are doing their best. Very amusing musicians. Just ordinary soldiers, guardsmen from various regiments. An all-army band.

But the musicians have no mouths. Perfectly smooth under their noses. The trumpets are thrust into their left nostrils.

They breathe with their right nostrils, blow with their left, and that gives the trumpets a very special tone—very gay and ringing.

“Ten-shun! Begin the music!”

“Shoulder arms!”

“Re-gi-ment!”

“Bat-ta-lion!”

“Com-pa-ny!”

“Battalion One—forward, march!”

Trumpets: “Toot-toot!” Bells: “Ting-a-ling-a-ling!”

Captain Shvetsov prances ahead on his glossy bay. The captain’s behind is as tight and smooth as a ham. Tap-tap-tap!

“Good for you, fellows!”

“Tweedle-dum, tweedle-dee.”

“Lieutenant!”

“Lieutenant! The General is asking for the Lieutenant!”

“Which lieutenant?”

“From Company Three. The General is asking for Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok!”

The General is on horseback in the middle of the square. His face is red, his whiskers are white.

“What does this nonsense mean, Lieutenant?”

“Ha-ha! Ho-ho! Hee-hee!”

“Are you mad? How dare you laugh? I’ll ... I’ll ... Do you realise who you’re speaking to?”

“Ha-ha! Hee-hee! You’re no General. You’re a cat, sir!”

The General is on horseback in the middle of the square. Down to his waist he’s a general, the rest of him is a cat. Not even a pedigreed cat. Just an ordinary tomcat—mangy grey-and-black. The sort that can be found in any backyard.

He clutches the stirrups with his paws.

"I shall have you court-martialled, Lieutenant! Unheard of! A guardsman, an officer, with his intestines showing!"

The lieutenant looked down and nearly fainted. True enough, out from under his scarf his intestines were protruding, very thin and of a greenish hue, and they were fastened to his belly-button, which was whirling round with dizzying speed. He seized his intestines but they wriggled out of his grasp.

"Arrest him for breaking his oath!"

The General drew one paw out of the stirrup, opened the claws, and reached for the lieutenant. On the paw was a silver spur set with an eye.

Just an ordinary eye. Round and yellow, and it looked into the very heart of the lieutenant.

It winked at him tenderly and began to speak. How an eye could speak nobody knows, but it spoke just the same.

"Don't be afraid," it said. "Don't be afraid. You're pulled through."

A hand raised the lieutenant's head and he opened his eyes to see a thin little face with a lock of auburn hair falling over the eyes—tender yellow eyes just like in the spur.

"What a fright you've given me, poor man! For a whole week I've been nursing you. I thought you was a goner. And us all alone on this island. No medicine, nobody to help. I pulled you through on nothing but boiled water. First you threw it all up. Foul water. Salty. Stomach wouldn't take it."

With difficulty the lieutenant grasped the meaning of these gentle, anxious words.

He raised his head slightly and gazed round with uncomprehending eyes.

Piles of fish everywhere. A fire burning. A kettle hanging from a tripod. Water boiling.

"What is it? Where am I?"

"Have you forgot? Don't you know me? Maryutka."

The lieutenant rubbed his forehead with a transparent hand. Remembering, he gave a faint smile.

"Ah, yes. Robinson and Friday."

"Oh, dear! Off again. You've got that Friday on the brain. I don't know what day it really is. I've lost count."

The lieutenant smiled again.

"I don't mean the day. It's a name. There's a story about

how a man found himself on a desert island after a shipwreck. He had a man named Friday. Haven't you ever read it?" He dropped back on the jacket and coughed.

"No. I've read lots of stories, but not that one. But you lie down. Lie still, don't move, else you'll get sick again. I'll boil some fish. You'll get strong once you start eating again. You ain't had a thing in your mouth but water this whole week. A body can see straight through you. Lie down."

The lieutenant closed his eyes weakly. His head was full of the ringing of bells. This reminded him of the trumpets with the bells on them and he gave quiet laugh.

"What is it?" asked Maryutka.

"Nothing in particular. I just remembered a funny dream I had when I was delirious."

"You kept crying out. Giving orders, swearing. What a time I had! The wind howling, nobody anywhere about, me all alone with you on this island, and you off your chump. Wasn't I scared, just!" She gave a little shudder. "I didn't know what to do."

"How did you manage?"

"I don't know myself. Most of all I was scared you'd die of starvation. I had nothing but water to give you. I crumbled all the hardtack that was left into the water you drank, and when it was gone there was nothing but fish. What's salt fish for a sick man? Wasn't I just glad when you began to come to!"

The lieutenant reached out and put his long fingers, beautiful in spite of the dirt, on Maryutka's arm.

"Thanks, Maryutka," he said, stroking her arm gently.

She blushed and pushed his hand away.

"Don't thank me. It's only natural. I'm not a beast, to let a man die."

"But after all, I'm an officer ... your enemy. Why should you have bothered to save me? You're half-dead yourself."

There was a moment's pause of puzzlement. But presently Maryutka dismissed her problem with a wave of her hand and a little laugh.

"Enemy—you? Why, you can't even lift a finger. A fine enemy! It's my fate, I guess. I didn't shoot you straight off—missed my aim for the first time in my life, and so it's my fate to worry along with you to the end. Here, eat this."

She held out a pot in which an amber chunk of sturgeon floated. The delicate flesh gave off a mild, tempting odour.

The lieutenant took out the fish and ate it with relish.

"But it's terribly salty. It burns your throat."

"Can't be helped. If there was fresh water I could soak the salt out of it, but there ain't. Salt fish and salt water, a fish-pox on them both!"

The lieutenant pushed the pot away.

"What's the matter, had enough?"

"Yes, thanks. You eat some."

"Me? I've ate nothing else for a week—it won't go down any more."

The lieutenant lay back propped up on his elbow.

"If only I had a smoke!" He sighed.

"A smoke? Why didn't you say so sooner? I found some tobacco in Semyanny's sack. It got a little wet, but I dried it. I knew you'd want to smoke. A smoker gets the longing worst after he's been ill. Here, take it."

The lieutenant was touched. He took the pouch in trembling fingers.

"You're a jewel, Maryutka. Better than any nursemaid."

"I guess blokes like you can't live without a nursemaid," said Maryutka drily, then blushed.

"I haven't any paper to roll a cigarette with. That Crimson of yours took every bit of paper I had, and I've lost my pipe."

"Paper?" Maryutka considered.

With a decisive movement she turned back the jacket lying on the lieutenant's knees, thrust her hand into the pocket, and pulled out a little bundle of paper. Untying the string, she held out a few sheets.

"Here's some," she said.

He took the papers and glanced at them. Then he looked at Maryutka. His eyes were full of blue consternation.

"But this is your poetry! Are you mad? I won't take them."

"Go ahead, damn it all! Don't go tearing the heart out of me, you fish-pox!" shouted Maryutka.

The lieutenant looked at her.

"Thank you, Maryutka. I'll never forget this."

He tore off a tiny corner, rolled a cigarette, and lighted up. Then he lay gazing into space through the blue tendril of smoke curling up from his cigarette.

Maryutka gazed at him intently. Suddenly she said:

"There's one thing I can't make out. What makes your eyes

so blue? I never seen eyes like that in my life. They're so blue you could drown in them."

"I don't know," said the lieutenant. "I was born with them. Lots of people have told me they were an unusual colour."

"And so they are. Soon as we took you prisoner I thought: what makes his eyes like that? They're dangerous, they are."

"For whom?"

"For women. They slip right inside of you before you know it. Stir a person up."

"Do they stir you up?"

Maryutka flared.

"Don't be so nosy—keep your questions to yourself. Lie down, I'm going for water."

She rose and picked up the pot nonchalantly, but as she went to the other side of the stacked fish she looked back gaily and said again, in the same tone:

"You blue-eyed silly, you!"

CHAPTER 8

For which no explanations are needed

March sun. Spring in the air.

March sun over the Aral Sea, over a sweep of blue velvet. It caresses, it bites with hot little teeth, it stirs up the blood.

For three days, now, the lieutenant has taken the air.

He sits outside the shed, warming himself in the sun, gazing about him with eyes that are alive and joyful, and blue as the deep blue sea.

Maryutka has been exploring the island.

From her last excursion she came back at sunset, elated.

"Tomorrow we're moving," she said.

"Where to?"

"Over there—about eight versts from here."

"What's there?"

"A fisherman's shanty. Like a palace! Dry, sound, even the glass in the windows is whole. It's got a stove and some broken dishes—they'll all come in handy. Best of all, it's got sleeping-bunks—no more sprawling on the floor. If only we'd gone there in the first place!"

"But we didn't know about it."

"That's just it. And I've discovered something else, too—a wonderful discovery."

“What?”

“Some food behind the stove. I guess that’s where the fishermen kept their supplies, and they left the remains behind. Some rice and about half a pood of flour. Sort of mildewed, but it can be ate. Maybe they saw an autumn storm coming and rushed away without bothering to take it with them. We’ll get on like a house on fire now!”

The next morning they set out for their new quarters. Maryutka walked ahead, loaded down like a camel. She wouldn’t let the lieutenant carry anything.

“You mustn’t. It’ll put you down again. Not worth it. Never fear, I’ll manage. I’m skinny, but I’m strong.”

By noon they were there. They dug away the snow, tied the door to its broken hinge, stuffed the stove with carp, lighted it, and warmed themselves at the fire with happy smiles on their faces.

“Swells, aren’t we? This is the life!”

“You’re a wonder, Maryutka. I’ll be grateful to you my whole life. I’d have died if it hadn’t been for you.”

“Course you would, you mamma’s boy.”

She held her hands out and warmed them at the fire.

“Warm as warm. Well, what are we going to do now?”

“Wait. What else?”

“Wait for what?”

“Spring. It won’t be long now. It’s the middle of March. In another week or two the fishermen will be coming for their fish and they’ll rescue us.”

“I hope you’re right. You and me can’t last much longer on this fish and mildewed flour. Another two weeks and it’s the fish-pox for us!”

“What’s that expression you’re always using—a fish-pox? Where did you get it?”

“In Astrakhan. All our fishermen say it. Instead of real swearing. I don’t like dirty words, but when my dander’s up I’ve got to say something. That’s how I let off steam.”

She stirred the fish in the stove with a ram-rod.

“You once said you knew a story about a desert island, remember? About Friday. Tell it to me now instead of just sitting here. It’s awful how I love to listen to stories! The village women used to come to my aunt’s house and bring old Gugnikha to tell stories. She must have been a hundred years old, or even more. Remembered Napoleon. I’d crouch in a

corner and listen, afraid to breathe for fear I'd miss a word."

"You want to hear about Robinson Crusoe? I've forgotten half of it, it's been so long since I read it."

"Try to remember. Tell me whatever comes back to you."

"I'll try."

The lieutenant half closed his eyes, searching his memory. Maryutka spread out her sheepskin jacket on the bunk and curled up in the corner nearest the stove.

"Come and sit over here. It's warmer here in the corner," she said.

The lieutenant sat down beside her. The fire gave off a cheering warmth.

"Well, why don't you begin? I can't wait—there's nothing I like better than a story."

The lieutenant put his chin in his hand and began:

"Once upon a time a rich man lived in the town of Liverpool. His name was Robinson Crusoe..."

"Where's that town?"

"In England. As I was saying, there lived a rich man named—"

"Wait. You say he was rich? Why is it all the stories are about rich folk, about princes and princesses? Why don't they make up stories about poor folk?"

"I don't know," said the lieutenant. "I never thought about it."

"I s'pose it's because it's the rich people themselves who make up the stories. Like with me. I want to write poetry, but I don't have the learning. If I did, I'd write poetry about poor people. Oh, well, I'll learn some day and then I'll write it."

"And so this Robinson Crusoe got the idea of setting off on a voyage that would take him round the world. He wanted to see how other people lived. One day he set out in a big sailing-vessel..."

The stove crackled cheerily and the lieutenant's words poured out in a steady stream.

Little by little the story came back to him—every little detail.

Maryutka listened with bated breath, giving little gasps at the most exciting places.

When the lieutenant described the shipwreck, she shrugged her shoulders incredulously.

"And everybody but him got drowned?" she asked.

“Everybody.”

“The captain must’ve been a blockhead, or else he got soaked to the gills on the eve of the wreck. A good captain’d never let his whole crew get drowned. We’ve had lots of wrecks on the Caspian, but never more than two or three men got drowned. The rest always got saved.”

“But we lost Semyanny and Vyakhir, didn’t we? Does that mean you were a bad captain? Or perhaps you were soaked to the gills?”

Maryutka gasped.

“Sharp, ain’t you, fish-pox! Get on with the story!”

When he got to the place where man Friday put in an appearance, Maryutka interrupted him again:

“So that’s why you called me Friday, is it? Like as if you was Robinson Crusoe. And you say Friday was black? A Negro? I saw a Negro once—at the circus in Astrakhan.”

When the lieutenant described the attack of the pirates, Maryutka’s eyes flashed.

“Ten against one? Dirty, wasn’t it?”

At last the story was over.

Maryutka sat silent for a while, nestling against his shoulder.

“It was lovely,” she murmured at last. “I bet you know lots of stories, don’t you? Tell me one every day.”

“Did you really enjoy it so?”

“Lots and lots. Made the shivers run up and down my spine. You’ll tell me stories every evening, won’t you? It’ll make the time pass quicker.”

The lieutenant yawned.

“Sleepy?”

“No, I just haven’t got my strength back yet.”

“Poor little boy!”

Again Maryutka stretched out her hand and gently stroked his hair. He turned astonished blue eyes on her. In their depths a spark of tenderness was kindled that flew to Maryutka’s heart. Dazed, she strained towards him and pressed her dry parched lips against his bristling wasted cheek.

CHAPTER 9

In which it is proved that, although the heart defies
all laws, one's being, after all,
determines one's consciousness

Lieutenant of the Guards Govorukha-Otrok was to have been the forty-first on Maryutka's death-list.

He became first in her list of joys.

She developed a tender yearning for him, for his slender hands, for his soft voice, and above all, for his extraordinary blue eyes.

Her world was irradiated with this blueness. She became oblivious of the dismal Aral Sea and the nauseating taste of salt fish and mildewed flour. Gone was her longing to be part of the raging roaring life beyond the dark expanses of water. During the day she had her tasks: she baked cakes of the flour, boiled the odious sturgeon (which was causing little ulcers to appear on their gums), and sometimes she went down to the beach to see if the longed-for sail were not tipping towards them over the waves.

In the evening, when the greedy sun rolled out of the vernal sky, she sat in her corner of the bunk, nestling happily against the lieutenant's shoulder and listening.

The lieutenant told her many stories. He was a good story-teller.

The days rolled by slowly, heavily, like the waves.

One day, while basking in the sun near their shanty, the lieutenant narrowed his eyes and shrugged his shoulders as he watched Maryutka scaling a fat carp with her usual dexterity.

"Hm. What utter rot!" he said.

"What's that, darling?"

"Rot, I say. Life. Utter rot. Primary conceptions, cultivated views—a lot of claptrap. Conventional symbols, like those on a topographical map. Lieutenant of the Guards? To hell with all Lieutenants of the Guards, I want to live. I've been alive for twenty-seven years, but I haven't lived yet. I squandered heaps of money, I travelled from one country to another in search of an ideal, and all the while I felt nothing but a great emptiness sucking at my vitals. If anyone had told me then that I would spend the most meaningful days of my life here, on this idiotic pancake of an island in the midst of this idiotic sea, I would never have believed him."

"What's that? What sort of days did you say?"

"The most meaningful. Do you understand? How can I put it so that you will understand? Days when I have not felt myself pitted against the whole world, an isolated unit struggling single-handed, but one merged completely with all this." He took in the universe with a sweep of his hand. "I feel myself inseparably a part of it all. Its breath is my breath. The breath of the tide, for instance—hear it? Swish, swish. It's not the sea breathing, it's me—my spirit and my flesh."

Maryutka put down her knife.

"That's putting it in the grand style. I don't get all the words. I'd just say—I'm happy here."

"The words are different but the meaning is the same. At present I should like never to leave the warmth of these absurd sands—to remain here for ever, to melt in the heat of this ragged sun and live the life of a contented beast."

Maryutka stared intently at the sand as if recalling something. Then she gave a tender, guilty little smile.

"The hell! I wouldn't stay here," she said. "It's too easy. Makes a person soft. There's not even anyone to show your happiness to. Nothing but dead fish. If only the fishermen would hurry and come! March must be almost over. I'm sick for the sight of live humans."

"Aren't we live humans?"

"We still are, but in a week's time, when even the dregs of that stinking flour is gone and the scurvy lets loose in us, what sort of a tune will you sing then? And besides, darling, you forget this is no time to loll on the stove-shelf. Our men are fighting out there, spilling their blood. Every hand is needed. How can I sit back and enjoy myself at a time like this? That's not what I took my army oath for."

The lieutenant's eyes flashed his surprise.

"Do you mean you intend going back to the army?"

"What else?"

The lieutenant played with a splinter he had broken off the door-post, and his voice flowed on in a deep rich stream.

"You foolish girl. This is what I wanted to say to you, Maryutka: I'm sick to death of all this bloodshed. How many years of hate and war have we had! I wasn't born a soldier. Once upon a time I lived the decent sort of life a human being ought to live. Before the war with Germany I was a student of philology, and I lived with books—beloved books, that

never betray you. I had lots of them. Three walls of my room were covered with them from floor to ceiling. I would sit in my room of an evening in a deep armchair, the fire burning brightly, the lamp glowing, while outside the St. Petersburg fog flicked a wet paw in the faces of the passers-by, and then, as now, I had a sense of being carefree and independent. And that gave rise to a certain blossoming of the spirit—one could almost hear the rustling of the blossoms—like the flowering of almond trees in the spring, do you understand?”

“Hm,” said Maryutka warily.

“And one fine day all that was exploded, smashed to smithereens. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I was sitting on the verandah of our country-house reading a book—I remember even that. There was a sinister sunset—deep red, giving everything a blood-like tinge. My father came up from town by train. He was holding a newspaper in his hand and seemed greatly agitated. He pronounced only one word, but there was deadly weight in it. War. A dreadful word, as bloody as the sunset. Then he said, ‘Vadim, your father, your grandfather, and your greatgrandfather responded to the first call of their country. I hope that you...’ His hopes were not in vain. I left my books. I left convinced I was doing the right thing.”

“Silly!” exclaimed Maryutka with a shrug of her shoulders. “If my old man bashes his head against the wall when he’s drunk, do you think I ought to do the same? I don’t see why.”

The lieutenant heaved a sigh.

“No, you could hardly be expected to see. You never had to carry the burden of a celebrated lineage, family honour. One’s duty—we were very sensitive about that.”

“Well, what of it? I loved my father too, but if he was a blooming soak, there’s no reason why I should be. You should have sent him packing.”

The lieutenant gave a crooked, bitter smile.

“I didn’t send him packing. I packed myself off—to the war. And there, with my own hands, I buried my human heart in that festering dung-heap, that universal graveyard. Then came the Revolution. I was glad. I put all my hope in it, but it... Look, not once in all the years I had been an officer in the tsarist army did I lay a finger on a soldier under me. But they caught me in the railway station in Gomel, snatched

off my shoulder-straps, and spat in my face. Why?... I managed to escape to the Urals. I still had faith in my country. Once more I set out to fight for her, and for the shoulder-straps that had been so dishonoured. The longer I fought, the clearer it became to me that I no longer had a country. And the shoulder-straps weren't worth fighting for. And I remembered the only thing that was humane and had lasting value. Thought. Ideas. I remembered my books. The only thing I want to do now is to return to them, to bury myself in them, to ask their forgiveness and settle down to live with them."

"So that's it, is it? The world's cracking in two, people are fighting for justice, spilling their blood, and you want to curl up on the sofa and read books?"

"I don't know ... and don't want to know!" cried out the lieutenant in desperation, leaping to his feet. "The only thing I know is that the world's coming to an end. You were right when you said it was cracking in two. Oh, it's cracking, all right! It's rotten and falling to pieces! It's empty, stripped of its guts! It's dying of emptiness. It used to be young, fertile, unexplored, with the lure of new lands, undiscovered riches. That's all over. There's nothing new to discover. Nowadays the mind's cunning is all expended on how to save what it has, to drag out existence for another century, another year, another week. Machines. Lifeless mathematics. And thought, made sterile by this mathematics, is concentrated on problems of how to exterminate human beings. The more human beings we exterminate, the fatter our own bellies and pockets will be. To hell with it all! I don't want to hear anybody's views but my own. Enough! I'm out of the running. I don't want to soil my hands any more!"

"Your pretty white hands! Your starched collars! You'll be big-hearted enough to let others dig in the dung for you, eh?"

"Let them, damn it all! Let anyone who has a taste for it. As soon as we're rescued, Maryutka, we'll go to the Caucasus. I've got a little place not far from Sukhumi. That's where we'll go. I'll settle down with my books and let the world go hang. What I want is peace and quiet. I don't want justice; I want peace. And you'll begin to study. You want to study, don't you? You've complained so many times that you had no chance to study. Well, here's your chance. I'll do everything for you. You saved my life and I'll never forget it."

Maryutka sprang to her feet.

"So that's what you want me to do, is it?" She hurled the words at him like nettles. "Lie beside you on a feather-bed while people are sweating out their life's blood for the sake of justice? Fill my belly with chocolates when every chocolate is bought with somebody else's blood? Is that what you want?"

"Come, now, must you be so coarse?" asked the lieutenant despondently.

"Coarse? You want everything nice and soft? Just you wait. You stuck your nose up at Bolshevik truth—'Don't want to know anything about it,' you said. Well, you don't know and never did know anything about it—what it really is and how it's soaked through and through with sweat and tears."

"No, I don't know," said the lieutenant listlessly. "But I find it very strange that a girl like you should let herself be so coarse."

Maryutka put her hands on her hips.

"I'm ashamed to have took up with the likes of you!" she burst out. "You worm, you spineless creature! 'Come away, deary, we'll loll on the bed, you and me, and have a nice quiet life!'" she mocked. "Other people are ploughing up the earth with their bare hands to make a new world, while you... Ugh! you are a son of a bitch!"

The colour rushed to the lieutenant's face and his lips formed into a thin line.

"Don't you dare! You're forgetting yourself, you slut!"

Maryutka took one step forward, lifted her hand, and struck the lieutenant full force on his thin unshaved cheek.

He fell back, trembling and clenching his fists.

"Lucky for you you're a woman," he hissed. "I hate you, you cheeky little hussy!"

He stalked off to the shanty.

Maryutka gazed dazedly at her stinging palm, then waved it deprecatingly.

"Ain't he the gentleman! A fish-pox on him!"

CHAPTER 10

**In which Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok hears
the roar of the doomed planet, and the author dodges
the responsibility of ending the story**

For three days Maryutka and the lieutenant did not speak to each other.

But it is hard for two people alone on a desert island to avoid each other.

And then, spring was in the air.

Spring arrived all of a sudden, in a rush of heat. The thin crust of ice covering the island had given way under the blows of spring's little golden hoofs some time before. Now the beach was a soft canary yellow against the thick blue glass of the sea.

At noon the sand was hot to the touch.

The sun rolled up into the sky like a wheel of gold, polished by warm breezes.

The two people on the island were weak from the sun, from the breezes, and from the scurvy that had begun to torture them.

This was no time to quarrel.

From morning to night they would lie in the sand of the beach, their inflamed eyes fixed on the blue glass, searching it for signs of a sail.

"I can't stand it any longer," Maryutka once moaned in desperation. "If the fishermen don't come in three days, I swear I'll put a bullet through my head."

The lieutenant gave a little whistle.

"I thought I was the spineless one. Patience, Maryutka, you'll be a big chief yet. That's all you're good for—to be a chief of a robber band."

"Why do you have to bring it up all over again? Can't you let bygones be bygones? It's true I got angry, but I had good cause to. It hurt to find you were so no-good. Hurt awful. You've wormed yourself into my heart to my own ruin, damn you, you blue-eyed devil!"

The lieutenant burst out laughing, falling on his back in the sand and kicking his feet in the air.

"What's wrong? Are you crazy?" asked Maryutka.

The lieutenant went on laughing.

"Hey, fat-head, can't you answer?"

But the lieutenant did not stop until Maryutka gave him a punch in the ribs. Then he got up and wiped the tears off his lashes.

"What you roaring at?"

"You're a rare specimen, Maria Filatovna! You'd cheer anybody up. You'd make even the dead dance."

"Why not? Or do you think it's better to go round in circles like a log in a whirlpool, neither coming to one side, nor to the other—making yourself dizzy and other people sick?"

Again the lieutenant burst out laughing, and he tapped Maryutka on the back.

"All glory to you, queen of the Amazons! My good man Friday! You've turned the world upside down for me, Maryutka! You've poured the elixir of life into my veins! I don't want to go whirling round any more like a log in a whirlpool, to borrow your expressive simile. I can see for myself that it's too soon for me to go back to my books. I've got to see some more of life first, got to bare my teeth, got to bite like a wolf so that others will be afraid of my fangs."

"What? Do you really mean you've come to your senses!"

"That I have, dear girl! I've come to my senses! Thanks for teaching me a thing or two. If we bury ourselves in our books at a time like this and let you do what you like with this old earth of ours, there'll be hell to pay. No, my dear little Amazon, it's too soon to—"

He broke off with a gasp.

The ultramarine orbs were fixed on the horizon and flames of joy were dancing in them.

He pointed out to sea and said in a quiet, trembling voice: "A sail."

Maryutka leaped up as if a spring had been released and stared in the direction of his finger. She saw a little white spark fluttering, quivering—a sail shaken by the wind.

She pressed her hands to her breast and feasted her eyes on the sight, unable to believe in the reality of this long-awaited moment.

The lieutenant jumped up and down beside her, seized her hands, tore them away from her breast, swung her in circles about him.

He did a dance in the sand, kicking up his thin legs and singing in strident tones:

*Whitely gleams a lonely sail
Upon an azure sea...
Tra-la-la! tra-la-la!
Fiddledy, diddledy-dee!*

"Stop it, you idiot!" laughed Maryutka happily.

"Maryutka! My darling girl! My queen of the Amazons! We're saved! We're saved!"

"See, you've got the longing to get back to the world of humans, too, haven't you?"

"I have, I have! I just told you so, didn't I?"

"Wait—we've got to let them know; we've got to signal."

"Why? They're headed here."

"What if they turn off to another island! There's millions of them. They may pass us by. Bring a rifle from the shanty."

The lieutenant rushed off. In a minute he came back throwing the rifle into the air and catching it.

"Don't fool with that thing! Fire three shots into the air!" called out Maryutka.

The lieutenant put the butt to his shoulder. Three shots shattered the glassy stillness, and each shot almost felled him. Only then did he realise how weak he had become.

Now the sail was plainly visible. Yellowish-pink, it skimmed over the water like the wing of a bird of good omen.

"What sort of a boat is it?" murmured Maryutka, staring at it intently. "Too big for a fishing smack."

Evidently those in the boat had heard the shots. The sail quivered and veered to the other side, and the boat, heeling well over, made straight for shore.

"Must be a boat belonging to some fishery inspector or other, but why should they be sailing this time of year?" asked Maryutka.

When the boat was about four hundred feet away it turned and a man's form appeared in the bow. Cupping his hands round his mouth, he called to them.

The lieutenant started, strained forward, threw down the rifle, and in two leaps was at the water's edge. He stretched out his arms and shouted in a frenzy of joy:

"Hoo-ray! Our men! Good lads! Hurry up!"

Maryutka peered intently at the boat and saw—gold bars gleaming on the shoulders of the man standing in the bow.

She fluttered like a frightened bird, then stiffened.

Memory flashed a picture before her eyes:

Ice ... blue water ... the face of Yevsukov. His words: "If you run foul of the Whites, don't give him up alive."

She gasped, bit her lip, snatched up the rifle.

"Back, you damned White Guard!" she shouted in despair. "Back, I tell you!"

The lieutenant went on waving his arms, standing ankle-deep in the sea.

Suddenly from behind him came the deafening blast of the planet, shattered by fire and storm. Instinctively he leaped aside to escape catastrophe. The blast of the dying world was the last sound his ears ever heard.

Maryutka looked at him.

His head was lying in the water. Red streams from his shattered skull were dissolving in the liquid glass.

She ran forward and knelt beside him. Dropping her rifle, she tore at the collar of her tunic. She tugged at the limp form, tried to lift the mangled head. Suddenly she collapsed on the body.

"Oh, what have I done? Look at me, sweet! Open your dear blue eyes!"

Just then the boat ground up on the sand, and its occupants stared dumbfounded at the girl and the man.

1924

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

A. Fadeyev

(b. 1901, Kimry near Tver—
d. 1956, Moscow)

Alexander Fadeyev grew up in a family of professional revolutionaries. He studied in Vladivostok at a commercial school. He joined the underground organisation of the Communist Party when the Far East was overrun by whiteguards and interventionists. He took part in the partisan movement for the liberation of the Soviet Primorye and rose from ordinary soldier to brigade commissar. He was twice wounded in battle—the second time on the ice in the Gulf of Finland, when with other delegates of the 10th Party Congress he was storming the fortress of Kronstadt where the whiteguards had mutinied. Upon convalescence Fadeyev took up Party work.

He first appeared in print at the age of twenty-two and became a professional writer at twenty-five. His out-of-the-ordinary social temperament inevitably resulted in his becoming one of the leaders of the Soviet writers' organisation. He did important public work and was an

active member of the peace movement. He had many distinguished friends, including Pablo Neruda, Frederic Joliot-Curie and Alexander Tvardovsky. Intensive social activity constantly took Fadeyev away from his writing desk and prevented him from finishing two major novels: *THE LAST OF THE UDEGEH*, an epic canvas about the Civil War era in the Far East, and *IRON AND STEEL*, dedicated to the post-war period. He must, however, be judged not by what he was unable to complete, but by his very considerable contribution to the development of Soviet literature. His novel, *THE YOUNG GUARD*, written in 1945, shook the whole reading world with its psychologically authentic narrative about the immortal exploit of a group of Komsomol youths in the town of Krasnodon, who conducted underground activities against occupational authorities and met a heroic death. But perhaps the most artistically finished and truly classic work by Fadeyev is his novel *THE ROUT* (1927). This was the first outstanding work of Soviet literature in which the images of the participants in the Civil War were presented with psychological depth. Fadeyev did not prettify the realities; he showed how different people of different spiritual and moral make-ups fought for the consolidation of the people's power; he showed—and he knew all about it from his own personal experience!—under what difficult conditions this struggle took place and what sacrifices it cost. Victory was won at a

price, and the conception of optimistic tragedy, so characteristic of Soviet literature, perhaps finds one of its most artistically successful resolutions in *THE ROUT*.

Critics have failed to agree about the identity of the principal character in the novel. Some affirm that it is the illiterate miner, Morozka, who pulls off a dazzling feat for the sake of his comrades when he faced with the dilemma, "treachery or death". Others hold that the central figure is the commander of the partisan detachment, the wise Bolshevik, Levinson, who speaks the words with which the novel concludes: "A man has to live and do his duty." Perhaps the real principal character is the unseen author who, in spite of his youth at the time, penetrated deep into the dramatic conflicts of the revolutionary struggle and who believed that one must see the world as it is, if one is going to make it as it should be....

The Rout

(An excerpt)

THE NINETEEN

About five versts from the spot where they had built the brushwood-road, a bridge spanned the bog along the route of the Tudo-Vaku state highroad. The previous evening, fearing that Levinson might decide against spending the night in the village, the Cossacks had prepared an ambush on the road, about eight versts from the bridge.

They had waited there the whole night in readiness for the company, and had heard the distant volleys of the guns. In the morning a messenger galloped up with orders. They were to stay where they were, since the enemy, having broken through the bog, were heading towards them. Only ten minutes after the messenger had galloped by, Levinson's company, knowing nothing of the ambush or of the warning given by the enemy rider, came out on the Tudo-Vaku highroad.

The sun had already risen above the forest; the hoarfrost had melted long since; the sky had opened, spreading high above them, transparently blue and icy. The trees, glistening wet and golden, hung over the road. The day promised to be warm, not like an autumn day at all.

Levinson glanced absently at all this light, pure shining beauty, and did not feel it. He looked at his company, exhausted, trailing miserably along the road, with two-thirds of the men missing; and he realised how deadly tired he was and how powerless to do anything for his men now, dragging wretchedly behind him. They alone in the whole world remained near and dear to him—these worn-out, faithful men; they were nearer to him than anything else, dearer to him than his own life, because not for a second did he cease to feel his responsibilities towards them; but it appeared that he could do nothing for them now, that he no longer led them, and it was only they themselves who were unaware of this and continued to drag themselves after him, like a herd accustomed to follow its leader. And it was precisely this terrible thing that he had feared most of all in the early

morning hours yesterday, when he had thought of Metelitsa's death.

He tried to take himself in hand, to concentrate on something practical and necessary, but his thoughts wandered and grew confused; his eyes closed stickily, and queer images, fragments of memories, vague impressions of his immediate surroundings, all of them befogged and contradictory, floated mistily in his head, changing ceaselessly, soundlessly, in an incorporeal swarm. "Why this long, endless road, and these wet leaves, and this dead sky, for which I have no use now? Yes, I must get to the Tudo-Vaku valley. Tudo-Vaku valley—what a strange name! But how tired I am, how I long to sleep! What else can these men want of me when I want to sleep so much? He's talking to me about scouts. Yes, to be sure, scouts.... He's got a round and kind head ... like my son's ... and of course we must send out scouts, and after that ... sleep, sleep.... Not even like my son's, but.... What is it? What did you say?" he asked suddenly, raising his head.

Baklanov was riding at his side.

"I say we ought to send out scouts."

"Yes, we ought to do that. Give the necessary orders, please."

A minute afterwards, riding at a weary trot, someone overtook Levinson. The commander followed the rider's hunched back and recognised Metchik. It seemed to him that it was somehow wrong that Metchik should go out on patrol, but he could not bother his head to discover exactly what was wrong, and the next moment he forgot all about it. Then somebody else rode past.

"Morozka!" Baklanov called to the second scout. "Don't lose sight of each other!"

"Is he still alive?" Levinson thought. "And Dubov's dead. Poor Dubov! But what did happen to Morozka? Ah yes, that was last night. Lucky for him I didn't see him."

Metchik, who had already ridden on a good way, looked back; Morozka was about fifty yards behind him, and the company could still be seen. Then both the company and Morozka were lost behind a bend in the road. Nivka did not want to trot, and mechanically Metchik spurred her on; he could not quite understand why he had been sent on ahead, but they had ordered him to go at a trot and he obeyed them.

The road wound along wet slopes, thickly overgrown with oaks and maples which still wore their red leaves. Nivka trembled nervously and kept close to the bushes. She took the uphill stretch at a walk. Metchik, dozing in the saddle, no longer urged her forward. At times he came to himself and gazed wonderingly at the impenetrable depths of the forest. It had neither beginning nor end, just as there was neither beginning nor end to his state of sleepiness, dejection, and the feeling of not being there at all.

Suddenly Nivka snorted in terror and plunged into the bushes, pressing Metchik against a yielding mass of branches. He raised his head and his sleepiness at once left him, banished by an indescribable panic: on the road, a few paces from him, stood the Cossacks.

"Get down!" one of them said in a husky whisper.

Another Cossack seized Nivka by the bridle. Metchik uttered a low cry, slipped from the saddle and dodging in a humiliating manner, suddenly hurled himself with lightning speed down the slope. His arms crashed against the damp, rough trunk of a tree; he sprang up and slipped again. Dumb with terror, he floundered on all fours for several minutes; then he jumped up at last and bashed along the ravine, hardly conscious of his body, clutching at anything that came within his grasp, and leaping incredibly high. They were pursuing him; the bushes crackled behind him, and somebody ran and swore, gasping in fury.

Morozka, knowing that there was another scout in front of him, paid little attention to what was going on about him. He was in that state of extreme exhaustion in which every thought, even the most vital thoughts, vanish and there remains only the urgent desire to rest—to rest at any cost. He thought no more of his own life, of Varya, or of what Goncharenko would think of him; he even had not the strength to regret the death of Dubov, although Dubov had been as near to him as anybody; he thought only of the moment when the promised land would at last open in front of him and he could lay his weary head in peace. This promised land he visualised in the shape of a large, peaceful village, bathed in sunshine, full of grazing cows and good people, and the smell of hay and cattle. He dreamed of how he would tie up his horse, and then drink a bowl of milk with a great chunk of sweet-smelling rye bread, and then he would

climb up to a hayloft and fall fast asleep, his head lying on his shoulder and his warm greatcoat tucked under his feet.

And when the yellow cap-bands of the Cossacks suddenly leaped up in front of him, and Judas backed up sharply, taking him into a clump of guelder-rose bushes, whose red leaves trembled like drops of blood before his eyes, his joyful vision of a large sunny village merged into the instantaneous realisation of the unheard-of, heinous treachery which had just been perpetrated here....

"He ran away, the viper!" Morozka said, picturing with extraordinary sharpness the hateful clear eyes of Metchik. He felt at the same time a torturing pity, which wrenched his heart, for himself and for the men who were riding behind him.

He did not regret that he was to die in a moment, that he would cease to feel, to suffer, and to move; he could not even imagine himself in that strange and fantastic state, since he still lived, suffered, and moved. But he understood quite clearly that he would never see that big village of his vision bathed in sunshine nor the dear comrades and brothers who were riding behind him. Nonetheless they were so much a part of him, those tired, unsuspecting men who had entrusted themselves to him, that he could not think of himself, could only think of warning them of the danger while there was yet time.... He snatched out his revolver and, holding it high above his head, so that he might be better heard, shot three times into the air as had been agreed.

At that moment there was a flash and a roar, the world seemed to split in two, and he and Judas fell into the bushes, his head thrown backwards.

When Levinson heard the shots—so unexpected and so incredible in his present state of mind—he could not at first grasp their meaning. He understood their meaning only when he heard the volley fired at Morozka, and the horses stood stock-still, lifting their heads and pricking up their ears.

He looked back helplessly, searching for support from others for the first time; but in the partisan's long and pale faces, which seemed to blend into a single, horrible, dumbly questioning face, he read the same helplessness and fear. "Here it is—what I feared all along!" Levinson thought, and made such a gesture with his hand as though he sought something to hold on to, but could not find it.

Suddenly he distinguished very clearly the simple, boyish face of Baklanov, a face somewhat naive, but blackened and hardened by weariness and the smoke of gunpowder. Holding a revolver in one hand, the other tightly clutching the horse's withers, on which the marks of his stubby, boyish fingers were plainly imprinted, Baklanov stared tensely in the direction from which the shots had come. And his naive face, with its high cheekbones, leaned forward expectantly, awaiting orders, burning with the genuine and dominating passion in the name of which the best men of the company had died.

Levinson started and drew himself up; something sweet and painful throbbed in him. Suddenly he drew out his sword, and he, too, leaned forward with glittering eyes.

"Shall we try to break through?" he asked Baklanov hoarsely, unexpectedly raising his sabre above his head so that it gleamed in the sun. And every partisan likewise started and drew himself upright in the stirrups.

Baklanov cast a wild look at the sabre, swung around to face the company, and shouted something in a piercing, sharp voice, something which Levinson did not catch, for at that moment, carried away by the same inner force which governed Baklanov and which had made him raise his sabre, he flew along the road, feeling sure that the whole company would at once fling themselves after him.

When he looked back a few moments later, the men were indeed galloping after him, crouching over their horses, their chins thrust aggressively forward, their eyes burning with the same tense passion which he had seen in Baklanov.

This was his last clear impression, because the next instant something blinding and deafening crashed down upon him, gripping him, whirling him, crushing him. Insensible, conscious only that he was still alive, he hurtled over a boiling orange-coloured abyss.

Metchik did not look back and no longer heard his pursuers, though he knew that he was still being pursued. When the three shots rang out, one after another, and the volley followed, he decided that they were firing at him and he ran faster. Suddenly the ravine widened into a small wooded valley. Metchik turned to right and left until finally he again rolled down a slope. At this moment a new volley

thundered, thicker and louder than the first, then another and another, without a pause. The whole forest shook and came to life.

“Oh, my God, my God! Oh, oh, my God!...” Metchik alternately whispered and cried out at each new deafening salvo, deliberately, pitifully twitching his scratched face as children do when they are trying to burst into tears. But his eyes were odiously, shamefully dry. He ran on and on, expending his last strength.

The noise of the firing began to die down; it seemed to have changed its direction. Then it ceased altogether.

Metchik looked back several times; he was not being pursued now. Nothing disturbed the remote, hollow stillness which lay about him now. Gasping, he fell down behind the nearest bush. His heart beat rapidly. Curled up in a ball, his cheek resting on his hand, staring fixedly in front of him, he lay motionless for several minutes. About ten paces from him, on a bare slender birch-tree, which curved almost to the ground and was bathed in sunshine, sat a little chipmunk, looking at him with naive, yellowish eyes.

All at once Metchik sat up, clasped his head, and groaned loudly. The chipmunk gave a terrified squeak and vanished in the grass. An insane sparkle appeared in Metchik's eyes. He dug his fingers into his hair and howled in agony, rolling on the ground. “What have I done? Oh, what have I done?” he repeated, rolling on his elbows and stomach. Each moment he perceived more clearly, with increasing shame and self-pity, the real meaning of his flight, the meaning of the first three shots and of all the firing which had followed. “What have I done? How could I have done it? Me, such a good, honest man who wished nobody any harm—oh, oh, how could I?...”

The more odious and villainous his behaviour seemed to him, the better, purer, and nobler he felt he had been before he had done this thing. And that tormented him not so much because scores of men who had entrusted themselves to him had perished as a result of his act, as because its ineffaceable, filthy, odious stain gave the lie to all the goodness and purity which he attributed to himself.

Mechanically he drew out his revolver and stared at it with horror and incredulity. But he knew that he would never kill himself, that he was incapable of killing himself; for there was nothing in the world he loved more than himself—his own

white, grimy, powerless hand, his whining voice, his sufferings, his own actions—even the most despicable of them. Furtively, stealthily, guiltily, horrified even by the touch of the oil which covered the revolver, trying to pretend that he did not know what he was about, he hastily put the revolver back in his pocket.

He did not groan or weep now. Hiding his face in his hands, he lay quietly on his stomach, and everything that he had lived through during the last few months, since he had left the town, again passed before him in a wearisome, mournful procession: his naive dreams, of which he was now ashamed, the anguish of his first encounters and his first wounds; Morozka; the hospital; the old man Pika with his silvery wisps of hair; the dead Frolov; Varya with her large, sad eyes which were unlike any eyes he had seen before or would ever see in the future; the last terrible crossing over the bog—compared with which everything else seemed trivial.

“I don’t want to live like that any longer,” Metchik thought with unexpected frankness and sobriety, and he was overcome with pity for himself. “I can’t stand it any longer. I can’t live such a low, inhuman, horrible life,” he thought again, eager to fan this feeling of self-pity, hoping to drown in these cowardly thoughts his own meanness and nakedness.

He still continued to reproach himself and felt sorry for what he had done, but he could no longer restrain the personal hopes and joyful ambitions which at once stirred in him at the thought that he was now entirely free and could go where life held no such terrors and nobody would know what he had done. “I’ll go back to the town now; there’s nothing else left for me to do,” he decided, trying to give to this thought an accent of grievous necessity, but scarcely able to repress a mingled feeling of joy and shame at the prospect and the fear that his dreams might not come true.

The sun had climbed round to the other side of the drooping birch, which was now completely in shadow. Metchik took out his revolver and threw it far away into the bushes. Then he found a tiny spring; he washed himself and sat down near it. He did not yet dare to go out into the road. “What if the Whites are there?” he thought fearfully. He heard the tiny spring tinkling gently in the grass. “Well, what’s the difference?” he thought abruptly, with that frankness and sobriety he now knew how to find beneath the

thick layer of good, kind, sentimental thoughts and feelings.

He sighed deeply, buttoned up his shirt, and walked slowly in the direction of the Tudo-Vaku highroad.

Levinson did not know how long his state of semi-consciousness had lasted; it seemed very long to him though actually it was not more than a minute. When he came to, he was surprised to find himself still in the saddle, but the sabre was no longer in his hand. In front of him bobbed the black-maned head of his horse, one ear spattered with blood.

It was only then that he became aware of the firing and realised that it was directed at them: the bullets screamed thickly overhead; but he likewise understood that the shots came from behind and that the most terrible moment was also behind. Then two riders came into line with him—Varya and Goncharenko. The blaster's cheek was streaked with blood. Levinson remembered the company, and looked back. But there was no company: the whole road was strewn with the dead bodies of men and horses. A few riders, led by Kubrak, tried desperately to catch up with Levinson; farther back were other small groups that became smaller with every moment. A figure on a limping horse, dragging at the rear, waved an arm and shouted. He was surrounded by men with yellow cap-bands who began to beat him with the butts of their rifles; he lurched and fell. Levinson grimaced painfully and turned away.

At this moment he, Varya, and Goncharenko reached a bend in the road. The noise of the firing grew fainter; the bullets ceased to scream past their ears. Mechanically, Levinson began to rein in his horse. One by one, the partisans who had broken through joined him. Goncharenko counted nineteen men, including himself and Levinson. They galloped down the slope for a long time, without uttering a single word, staring with eyes which still hid terror, but which filled gradually with joy, at the narrow, yellow, silent road that ran swiftly ahead like a hunted yellow dog....

Little by little the horses fell into a trot, and now they could distinguish in detail the burnt tree-stumps, the bushes, the mileposts, the clear sky overhanging the distant forest. Then the horses went on at a walk.

Levinson rode a little in front of the others, lost in thought,

his head drooping. Sometimes he looked back helplessly, as if he wanted to ask something and could not remember what; he looked at them with a prolonged, unseeing stare, his glance strange and full of pain. Suddenly he reined in his horse and turned back; for the first time a look of understanding came into his large deep blue eyes. The eighteen men stopped as one. It became very quiet.

"Where's Baklanov?" Levinson asked.

The eighteen men looked at him in silence and wonderment.

"They've killed Baklanov," Goncharenko said at last, and he stared sternly at his big, knotted hand which held the reins.

Varya, sitting with her back hunched by his side, suddenly fell forward on the neck of her horse and sobbed loudly and hysterically. Her long, ruffled plaits hung almost to the ground and seemed to writhe. The horse twitched its ears wearily and drew in its sagging lip. Siskin looked sideways at Varya, gulped, and turned quickly away.

Levinson's eyes remained fixed for several seconds above the men's heads. Then all at once he seemed somehow to collapse and shrink, and everybody at once saw that he had grown very weak and become much older. But he was no longer ashamed of his weakness and he no longer tried to hide it; he sat with downcast eyes, slowly blinking his long wet eyelashes, and the tears ran down his beard. The men looked away from him in fear that they, too, might break down.

Levinson turned his horse and slowly rode on ahead. The company followed him.

"Don't cry. It won't do any good," Goncharenko said guiltily, patting Varya on the shoulder.

Time and again, when Levinson managed to forget himself, he looked back uncertainly; remembering that Baklanov was not there, he began to cry again.

So they rode out from the forest—nineteen of them.


The forest ended unexpectedly, and they saw a high and vast blue sky and bright, russet-coloured, harvested fields spreading out on either side and bathed in the sunshine. On one side, beyond a knot of willows, through which the gleaming blue surface of a swollen river could be seen, lay a threshing-ground, resplendent with the golden crowns of the stout haystacks. There another life was seething, a gay and busy life. People swarmed there like many-coloured insects; sheaves of wheat flew through the air; the threshing-machine

whirred with a clear, dry sound; excited voices and bursts of shrill, girlish laughter rose from the whirling clouds of shining chaff and dust. Behind the river, propping up the sky and rooted in yellow-tressed woods, loomed the blue mountain ranges, and through their toothed summits a transparent frame of pinkish-white cloud, salted by the sea, poured into the valley, as frothy and bubbly as milk fresh from the cow.

Levinson looked silently, with moist eyes, at the vast sky and earth, which promised bread and rest, at these alien people on the threshing-ground whom he would soon have to make his own—as near and dear to him as were the eighteen who followed him in silence; and he ceased crying. A man has to live and do his duty.

1925-1926

Translated by Ovidy Gorchakov



(b. 1883, Nikolayevsk, now
Pugachev
near Saratov—d. 1945,
Moscow)

It would be hard to find a writer in the rich history of Soviet literature with a more strange career than that of Alexei Tolstoy. Consider the following juxtapositions: Count Alexei Tolstoy, and deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Alexei Tolstoy; white emigrant Alexei Tolstoy, and eminent Soviet writer and patriot, Alexei Tolstoy...

Before explaining these paradoxes, let us note Alexei Tolstoy's own admission: he said that had it not been for the October Revolution, which, as it were, gave him wings, he would most surely have remained a small, third-rate unknown writer. This is a fact. Alexei Tolstoy's pre-revolutionary works and those written by him in emigration (he was abroad from 1918 to 1923), do not rise above mediocre belles-lettres.

It took a colossal spiritual shake-up, a total revaluation of his views, for Alexei Tolstoy to accept Soviet power as the only force that could ensure the freedom of the

Russian people and the independence of the Russian state, and to find for his writing new content, immeasurably greater in scope than before. His heritage is very considerable in volume and highly significant in its artistic merit: short stories, short novels, plays and *PETER THE FIRST*, a remarkable Soviet historical novel about a period of convulsive transformation in the history of the Russian state, a period that was both tragic and creative. But Alexei Tolstoy's central work is undoubtedly the monumental *ORDEAL*, consisting of three novels: *THE SISTERS*, 1918 and *BLEAK MORNING*. The trilogy was completed by Alexei Tolstoy on 22 June 1941, the day when the nazis treacherously invaded the Soviet Union. It retraces the moral searchings of the Russian intelligentsia in their endeavour to find true spiritual values. The principal characters are two sisters, Katya and Dasha, and two men: both have been officers in the past, fighting in the tsar's army, but then they find themselves on opposite sides of the front in the Civil War. They are Vadim Roshchin, who believes that the truth of life is with the Whites, and Ivan Telegin, who is convinced that it is with the Reds, with the people who have risen in the struggle for their rights.

There is something of the ancient epic in the road trodden by each of the main characters; the road of torments, endless sufferings, starvation, death and blood, inflicted on the Russian people before the paths of the four cross again, before

each attains an understanding of a truth much loftier than the one that guided them before. They discover one another, they discover their homeland, they discover the human values for the sake of which life is worth living.

The historical part of OR-DEAL is documentary, but its scope of generalisation broadens steadily as events unfurl. Count Alexei Tolstoy passed through an ordeal of his own before he returned to his people, and they recognised him as one of their greatest artists.

Ordeal

(An excerpt)

...In the white morning mist which lay low over the plain, five riders rode by at a gallop—Roshchin, bent almost double over the neck of a sorrel mare with a clipped mane, Dundich, the little Serb in command of one of Budyonny's squadrons, half a length in front on a black stallion, and behind them, urging on their horses, Latugin, Gagin, and Zaduiviter. Roshchin and Dundich wore light-coloured officers' greatcoats with gilt shoulder straps, the other three, cockaded caps and sheepskin jackets with sergeants' shoulder straps.

In his undeviating progress through life, Dundich had found a second native land. He had fallen in love with the boundless land of Russia and its boundless revolution with the passion of a nature which was simple, enthusiastic and utterly intrepid.

The task allotted to them was to get into Voronezh, see how the artillery was posted, discover the strength of cavalry and infantry forces, and, finally, hand over to General Shkuro, in command of the defence, a sealed envelope containing a letter from Budyonny.

Dundich loved life, and loved gambling with his life, and just now, in these October days when the muscles went taut beneath his tunic, and every inhalation of the crisp air in the morning mist brought with it a whole gamut of odours, he found idleness especially irksome. He had volunteered to hand the sealed dispatch over to Shkuro himself. He had sought out Roshchin, and said to him:

"Vadim Petrovich, you're just the man wanted for a certain little adventure. You know the ways of officers, and all their little mannerisms. Would you consent to dash over to Voronezh with me? It'll take one day, and it'll be a splendid ride. Budyonny promises us his own horses, Petushok and Aurora..."

It was absurd to talk about consenting or not consenting, although the mention of officers' "mannerisms" grated unpleasantly on Roshchin's ears. But in fact he had to spend a whole evening teaching his comrades how the lower ranks deported themselves, how to salute and answer questions, and

what volunteer officers ought to look like, whether Drozdovsky's men, with their ironical faces and fondness for wearing pince-nez, in honour of their late chief, or Kornilov's followers, with their traditional dull stare and expression of contemptuous disillusionment, or the Markovites, who made a point of wearing filthy greatcoats and using still filthier language.

It was settled that, in case of their being stopped and questioned, they were to say: "We are carrying a secret dispatch to Voronezh from the commander of a Volunteer reserve regiment arrived in Kastornaya from the South." This would be both vague and convincing.

After about three hours of fast riding in the pale light flashing out every now and then from beneath the leaden clouds, they came in sight of Voronezh—domes, lookout towers, reddish roofs. They had not been molested by a single reconnoitring party the whole way—the patrols simply trained their field glasses on the five horsemen galloping in the direction of the town, and rode on at a walk. The first delay had occurred at the hastily knocked-together wooden bridge. It was guarded and several imposing persons in peakless caps and white sheepskin coats like those worn by Ukrainian peasant women, were strolling up and down it. They all had spreading beards. At the other end was a group of cadets standing beside the bridgehead trenches and smoking.

Dundich reined in his horse, leaped from the saddle and began tightening the girths.

"It would be desirable not to show faked passes here," he said, under his breath. "But the river's up, and it would be still less desirable to get wet to the neck fording it somewhere else. We shall have to ride over the bridge."

"All right, we'll swear our way across somehow," said Latugin.

Here Zaduviter said, almost choking with laughter:

"Strike me blind, mates, if those aren't priests on the bridge—the long-haired brigade."

"At the walk, forward—and look cheerful," said Dundich, leaping into the saddle like a cat.

The bearded men on the bridge began calling out discordantly: "Halt! Halt!" Dundich rode straight at them, holding the reins tight and tickling Petushok with the spurs. But they raised such a din, and waved their rifles so violently that his

horse began tucking in its hindquarters and lashing its tail angrily, and he had to stop. Several hands came out to seize the bridle. Urging his horse forward, Latugin shouted:

"You must be mad! How dare you touch His Honour's bridle? Who are you, anyhow? Show your papers!"

"Silence! Rein in your horse!" said Dundich, addressing Latugin calmly over his shoulder. Then he bent from the saddle to the bearded men, his white teeth showing from beneath the bristling moustache.

"Is a pass needed to go over this bridge? I haven't got one. I'm Colonel Dundich and this is my escort... Are you satisfied? Thank you..."

And laughing, he sent Petushok forward with such impetus that the horse snorted and reared, showing his velvety-grey belly, and dashed past the bearded men, who hardly had time to leap aside. But Dundich quieted the steed instantly, and proceeded at a walk. By now the alarm had been raised on the other side. The cadets flung away their cigarettes, and rushed stumbling over the hems of their long greatcoats, to the clayey trenches, from which the muzzles of two machine guns were trained on the horsemen. The commander of the bridgehead fortifications, a tall officer with a languid moustached countenance, drawled out in an insolent voice, so familiar that Roshchin set his jaw in disgust:

"Hi, you there on the bridge, dismount and prepare your passes... At the count of two I shall open fire..."

Dundich spoke to Roshchin out of the corner of his mouth:

"Can't be helped, shall have to attack."

His hand went towards his sword. Roshchin stopped him with a quick movement.

"Teplov!" he called out to the tall officer. "Leave your machine guns alone! It's me—Vadim Roshchin..."

And he got off his horse with unhurried movements, and led it over the bridge by the bridle. The officer was that same Vaska Teplov, Roshchin's one-time comrade-in-arms, the drunken, boastful fool whom Roshchin had once seriously threatened to give a punch in the face for slanderous and filthy insinuations. Slowly returning his revolver to the holster, Teplov regarded Roshchin's approaching figure suspiciously.

"Don't you know me?... Have you been on a bend, or what? Morning, morning, old chap!" Roshchin gave him his

hand without removing the glove. "What are *you* doing here? What's the idea of scraping together a brigade of fat-bellied beavers, you ass? It's time you were in command of a regiment... Demoted again—what? For being drunk, of course!"

"Good Lord, it's Vadim Roshchin!" lisped Teplov,—there was a black hole beneath his moustache where the front teeth should have been. The purple bags under his eyes quivered. "Where have you come from? We thought you had deserted..."

"Much obliged!" said Roshchin with a hard, hot look right into Teplov's eyes, a look which made Teplov decide to say no more about desertion. "You seem to have a high opinion of me... I was at Grishin-Almazov's in Odessa all the time... And now I'm Chief of Staff of the Fifty-First Reserve Regiment. Perhaps you'd really like to see my papers though?" he added defiantly, turning and calling out: "Come here, Dundich, you needn't dismount..."

Teplov merely sniffed angrily, he had always been afraid of Roshchin.

"Nonsense!... That's a funny way to talk to me, Roshchin... Where are you going?"

"To General Shkuro. We've brought a regiment to help you out. I hear Budyonny has given you a good fright..."

"Yes, this is such a mucking hole... The whole civilian population has been mobilised—a lot of retired generals and beastly civil servants ... they put the priests into uniform and sent them to me...."

Roshchin took out his cigarette case, which contained foreign cigarettes seized from one of the carts from enemy headquarters the day before. Teplov lit up, sending out a fragrant stream of smoke over his moustache.

"Fancy!" he said in astonishment. "Real foreign cigarettes. Where did you get them? We get nothing but shag ... it gives you the most infernal heartburn. Do give me a couple more, just to keep."

"How are things in general, Vaska?"

"Beastly ... no money... I'm fed up with everything."

He peered from beneath his eyebrows at Dundich, leaping out of the saddle, and the three morose cavalrymen behind him. "If you are counting on having a good time in Voronezh, gentlemen, you're in for a disappointment... The Red swine

have cleaned up everything—not a café or a bawdyhouse left, simply nowhere to rest...”

“Let me introduce Colonel Dundich,” said Roshchin.

“Captain Teplov.”

The two men saluted. Dundich, his dusky face with the darting eyes wrinkled up in laughter, said:

“What a pity! And we were hoping for a good time ... we’ve come provided with the needful...”

“Well, of course there are girls to be found in private houses, and you can get prewar vodka, the black-marketers even have champagne hidden away ... five hundred rubles a bottle! It’s a disgrace!”

Teplov’s continually watering eyes expressed indignation from beneath the puffy lids. “The military authorities treat these profiteers as if they were sort of saints... Saviours of the fatherland! We had a bit of a carouse in Tambov, you see... Well, of course the bill was preposterous, and of course we had nothing to pay with, so I let out in the man’s face and got away, and for that I was demoted... Morale is very low in our units, Vadim. Hang it all, aren’t we giving our lives? Our youth is passing... And what is there ahead of us? Moscow devastated ... utter penury... It’s all very well for you, you’ve been to the university, when you take off your lousy uniform you can give lectures or something... I shall have to go on with the same old dreary round—and we shan’t even be allowed to have a proper army...”

“You need a change, Captain,” said Dundich. “Come to the town with us. We only have to deliver the dispatch to the commander, and then the whole night is before us... I’ll stand the champagne...”

“Damn it all!” said Teplov, his hand flying up to scratch himself behind the ear. “I can’t just leave my post all of a sudden...”

“Hand over the command to the senior N.C.O. in the platoon,” suggested Roshchin. “You can tell the commandant that you half suspect us of being Red patrols in disguise. They can’t do more than curse you for a fool...”

Teplov opened his toothless mouth and laughed, wiping his eyes.

“That’s an idea! Why, I even wanted to arrest you...”

“So you did.”

“Sergeant Gvozdev!” shouted Teplov, and his voice now

had a cheerful ring; he turned towards the trench, where the cadets had fallen back into their trance of boredom at the machine gun. And when the sergeant, a blue-eyed lad of eighteen, came up, saluting smartly, his elbow on a level with his shoulder, Teplov handed the command over to him and ordered his horse to be brought round.

On the way to town, fidgeting in his saddle in his impatience, Teplov gave all the information required: the number of military units in Voronezh, the amount of artillery, and where they were posted...

"It's sheer animal panic, that's all... Kutepov, forsooth, has a misfortune at Orel, and our lot shit in their pants... It usen't to be like that... Remember the Frost Campaign, Vadim? The only thing you hear now is: 'We have lost heart.' Yes, yes, something has gone—the former ardour... And the muzhiks here are swine—we get nothing but dirty looks from them... General Kutepov was right a thousand times when he barked out to the Commander-in-Chief: 'Moscow can be taken on one condition: that we give the population land reform and gallows...' Not a single telegraph post must be left unoccupied ... whole villages must be hung at a time, as in the days of Pugachev ... but all that's a bloody bore... Somebody gave me the address of two sisters, highly obliging girls, they can play the guitar and sing drawing-room ballads—enough to drive you crazy! Listen—suppose we go straight there!"

Teplov seemed to be very well known, and the few patrols they met merely saluted, without so much as glancing at Dundich and Roshchin. They turned in at the iron portico of a hotel in the principal thoroughfare. Teplov dismounted, stretching his legs:

"I don't want to be too conspicuous," he said bashfully. "I'll wait for you here... Headquarters is on the second floor... Don't be long, gentlemen!"

He then said severely to the moustached and pock-marked Kuban Cossack standing in the entry: "Let them in, blockhead!"

Dundich and Roshchin ascended the wrought-iron staircase. Budyonny's dispatch was addressed: "Major General Shkuro, Private and Confidential." It had been decided to deliver it through an adjutant. The office was housed in the restaurant,

the bedraggled windows of which had broken panes. Just as Dundich and Roshchin went in, two men entered ahead of them by another door: the face of one of them, a tall, top-heavy fellow with luxuriant whiskers, was not without a certain crude handsomeness; he walked with the help of a crutch which rumpled the cloth under the sleeve of his light-grey general's overcoat. Roshchin recognised Mamontov. The other, who wore a brown Circassian tunic, had an inflamed, brutal countenance, high cheekbones, and an upturned nose with wide nostrils—this was Shkuro. On entering the room they stopped before a table at which a youthful staff officer in extravagantly flared riding breeches was dictating to a pretty blonde, whose hands rose and fell over the keys of her Underwood.

Roshchin pointed out Shkuro to Dundich asking, "What's our next step?" Just then Mamontov turned, and, seeing two officers he did not know, called to them in a deep voice:

"Come over here, gentlemen!"

Roshchin drew himself erect and remained at the door. Dundich went up to Shkuro.

"I have a dispatch to hand to Your Excellency."

Shkuro, who was standing almost with his back to Dundich, did not turn round, merely stretching out his strong red neck, which the braided collar dug into, and, without looking at the face of his interlocutor, asked, his upper lip raised wolfishly:

"Who is the dispatch from?"

"From the commander of the Fifty-First Reserve, which has come to the right bank of the Don to place itself at your disposal..."

"Fifty-First Regiment—never heard of it," said Shkuro, as disagreeably as before, though he turned and took the envelope, revolving it in his hands. "Who's the commander?"

Vadim Petrovich, standing in the doorway, felt a shiver run down his spine and dropped his hand on to the butt of his revolver in the pocket of his greatcoat. Things had turned out all wrong, it was idiotic, all no good... Dundich would blurt out some unknown name ... and what a pity it was—valuable information could have been taken to Budyonny...

"Count Chambertin is in command of the Fifty-First Regiment," replied Dundich without hesitation, his gay glance challenging Shkuro's somnolent, bilious squint. "May we go, Your Excellency?"

"Just a minute, Colonel!" It was Mamontov, turning clumsily on his crutch. "I seem to know that name, let's have a look!" A grimace passed over his handsome fleshy face: the clumsy movement had caused sharp pain to his splint-sheathed leg, the bone in which had been shattered by a bullet the week before, when he was fleeing from Budyonny... "The devil!" he muttered. "Oh, the devil! You may go, Colonel..."

Dundich saluted, turned on his heel, and went to the door. Roshchin watched Shkuro tear the envelope slowly, saying something the while to Mamontov, whose face was still contorted with pain. The envelope contained a letter signed by Semyon Budyonny. Dundich and Roshchin were aware of its contents: "On October 24th, 6 a.m., I shall be in Voronezh. I order you, General Shkuro, to have all counterrevolutionary forces drawn up on the square in front of the stalls, where you hung the workers. I order you personally to review the parade..."

They descended the iron staircase. Cadets armed with rifles were coming up in single file. It seemed to Roshchin that little Dundich in front of him, holding his head high and jingling his spurs, was going too slow... Unnecessary, foolish bravado!

A loud, hoarse cry came from the second floor... Dundich and Roshchin emerged from the entry, where Teplov rushed up to them from the pavement, his flabby face with the drooping moustache suffused with the craving for champagne, drawing-room ballads, and girls...

"Thank the Lord, gentlemen... Come on..."

Thrusting his foot into the stirrup he hopped beside his jibbing horse. Roshchin was already in the saddle. Dundich took out his cigarette case and lit up, his dry brown fingers trembling slightly. Then, flinging away the burning match, he took the bridle from Latugin and said harshly:

"First turning on the left, at a gallop!"

The first turning on the left was only ten houses away: Latugin, Gagin and Zaduviter, their horses' hoofs clicking over the cobblestones, were the first to turn into the side street. Reining in his horse and turning, Teplov yelled:

"It's the next turning on the right, gentlemen..."

But his horse carried him left with the rest. As Roshchin turned the corner he looked back and saw the cadets racing

out of the hotel door, glancing round hastily and clicking the locks of their rifles.

"What the hell, Roshchin?" shouted Teplov, on the verge of tears, going into a gallop with the others. Dundich rode right up to his horse and bending down at the gallop took Teplov firmly by the wrist, broke the lanyard of his revolver, and dragged the revolver out of the holster.

"The champagne's on me!" he shouted, showing his teeth in a grin.

All five—Dundich, Roshchin, and the three others—were now tearing up the crooked street at full speed, past small houses and fences, their caps catching in the bare twigs of ancient lime trees. Shots rang out behind them. Without slackening speed they galloped over the plain, fell into a trot again near the bridge, and rode up to the bridgehead trenches at a walk. Dundich, patting the smoking neck of his horse, called out:

"Sergeant Gvozdev!"

When the latter, concealing his cigarette in his cuff, came up Dundich said: "Captain Teplov asked me to inform you that he will be back in half an hour. We shall be here again on the morning of the 24th, so please don't frighten us with your machine guns any more..."

"Very good, Sir!"

When, the bridge far behind them, they were giving the foam-flecked, stumbling horses a rest under cover of the dusk, Dundich said to Roshchin:

"I feel ashamed of myself before you and the other comrades. I've often had to upbraid myself for showing off... Danger is intoxicating, sharpens the wits, makes a man in love with himself, so that the aim is forgotten, and all sense of responsibility is lost ... and afterwards comes repentance ... every time... If my comrades were to get off their horses this minute, and drag me off mine by the leg and give me a sound drubbing, I would not be the least offended, it would even be a relief..."

Roshchin threw back his head and laughed heartily—he, too, had felt the need of relaxation, after the prolonged strain he had undergone.

"You certainly do deserve a licking, Dundich—especially for the cigarette in the entry..."

Budyonny's ruse had worked. Mamontov and Shkuro, after reading the letter, delivered with such incredible audacity into their very hands, were seized with indescribable rage. What confidence was required to have written like that, actually naming the day and hour of the taking of Voronezh! And Budyonny evidently had that confidence. The White generals completely lost their balance.

Budyonny's plan for the defeat of the White cavalry was based on a counterattack by all his own concentrated forces in succession against the three columns of the Don and Kuban divisions endeavouring to surround him. These had delayed their offensive, contenting themselves with reconnoitring. Now he was quite sure that they would rush headlong to the attack.

On the night of the 18th of October the Red patrols reported movement in the enemy's camp. The hour of the bloody battle had struck. Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny, seated over the map with his divisional chiefs, said: "Good luck!" and gave the order to all divisions, regiments and squadrons:

"To horse!"

Field telephones rang in dark huts, in the steppe, in dugouts, hidden beneath branches and hay, or simply in haycocks. Through the receivers the signalmen heard the long-awaited order. Orderlies, hurling themselves into the saddle, settling into their stirrups at the gallop, sped through the darkness. The soldiers, sleeping in their clothes that windless night, dark as an enemy's grave, awoke to a long-drawn yell: "To horse!", leaped to their feet, shaking off sleep, rushed to the horse lines, and hastily saddled their horses, tightening the girths so ruthlessly that the beasts staggered.

The squadrons assembled in the field, guided to their places in the dark by the shouted words of command rolling from line to line. They formed and waited long, watching the sky for the first signs of dawn. The horses were still breathing sleepily. The chill air penetrated the men's wadded jackets sheepskin coats and thin army greatcoats. The men were silent, no one smoked.

And then, from afar, came the gurgling sound of the first shot. The voices of the commissars rang out: "Comrades Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny orders you to smash the

enemy... The bourgeois hirelings are striving to get to Moscow—death to them! Cover the revolutionary arms with glory!”

The dawn did not light up the fields, owing to the mist lying on the ground. With thundering hoots, stirrup to stirrup, the eight Budyonny regiments tore by in deploy formation, several miles long. In the dense mist each rider could only see a comrade on the right, a comrade on the left, and just ahead the croups of horses bobbing up and down in the milky, dissolving haze.

The enemy was near, and coming ever nearer. Spasmodic firing could now be heard. Budyonny’s men, urging on their horses, craned their necks for a glimpse of him... At last a shout, growing ever louder, more furious, and fiercer, ran through the whole formation. The front lines had sighted the enemy.

From the mist emerged the shadowy forms of wheeling horsemen. The hearts of the Don Cossacks failed them. They too had rushed in thousands upon the foe. Surely it must have been the Evil One himself who had lured them so far from their native villages to clash swords with these Red devils! They heard the earth hum and quake, and knew that a dread force was about to fall on them, crushing men and horses, whirling them round, piling them in a heap of mutilated bodies... And what was it all for? The Cossacks, trusting to their mettlesome Don chargers, backed and turned... All but a few daredevils, drunk with their own audacity, who rushed headlong into the Budyonny lines, laying about them with their swords.

The Don steeds could not save their riders. Those who had wheeled round ran up into others who were still forging ahead... Comrades-in-arms threw one another... Budyonny’s men cut them down, trampled them beneath their horses’ hoofs, put them to flight... Wild shrieks rang out... Everywhere, pairs of horsemen could be seen in the mist—one clinging to his horse’s neck, the other in pursuit, leaning back in the saddle and brandishing his sword for the blow... The maddened horses squealed and snapped...

... The terrible rout of their first column and the frustration of their original plan made the Whites give up the idea of

encircling Budyonny, who was not slow to profit by the enemy's confusion. Next morning, at dawn, Budyonny's men attacked the second Mamontov column, which also, unable to sustain the impact, was obliged to retreat towards the railway, under cover of an armoured train, clattering heavily over the bridges from Voronezh. Beneath its steel turrets, artillery officers stood by the 6-inch guns and machine guns, peering into the slowly thinning mist. Every now and then a signalman appeared on the line ahead, waving a flag, and the train stopped for a moment to receive information. It was thus that they learned of the desperate state of the second column, forced back to the railway by Budyonny's troops.

The armoured train gathered speed, its hoarse whistle rent the air incessantly, promising speedy relief to Mamontov's men.

The gunners, looking through the loopholes in the turret, discerned a vague form in the mist, rushing over the tracks to meet the armoured train. Slowing down, the engine driver slammed on the brakes and reversed, and the gunners opened fire on the shadowy form, which was rapidly increasing in size. But it was too late. A huge goods engine, with nobody in it, crashed full-steam ahead into the steel-plated front carriage of the armoured train. The engine was crammed with dynamite front and sides. There was an explosion. The shells in the front carriage of the armoured train instantly exploded, too. The carriage up-ended in a vortex of earth, sand, flames, smoke, and steam, and turned over, dragging with it the whole length of the marvellous steel tortoise, as it rolled down the embankment.

Mamontov's second column fled towards Voronezh. The third column withdrew in the same direction, without firing a shot; but on the fourth day of this unprecedented carnage it was forced to accept battle and was routed, strewing the fields and hillocks for miles around with the slaughtered bodies of Cossacks.

The battered Don and Kuban divisions—some of their regiments had lost half their strength—crossed to the other side of the river. In the early morning of the twenty-fourth, Budyonny's main forces followed them there. The wooden bridge, formerly guarded by the priests' detachment and Teplov's cadets, was abandoned—there had been no time to blow it up. Several batteries were firing from the town,

raising columns of mud and water... Budyonny rode up to the bridge, which he discovered to be a jerry-built affair. Sending for the musicians with the silver bugles, he ordered them to cross over to the other bank and play the gayest, most stirring tunes they knew—marches and dances. The conservatoire students, still in the short, badly-worn coats with the red-and-yellow tabs they had been wearing when captured, ran over the bridge, and got to the other side just as a shell blew it up. Half dead with fear, they blew blasts on their silver trumpets to the roar of the explosions.

Every mounted Red Army man was given a shell to carry across in his hands. "Forward!" cried the commissars and commanders, rushing ahead of the squadron into the icy water, which seethed and splashed with bursting shells. When they reached the middle of the river the men slipped off their saddles, and swam, each holding on to his horse's mane with one hand, and bearing the shell in the other. Gun teams plunged into the angry flood, dragging the guns along the river bed. Once on the other side, Budyonny's men, dripping and fierce, rushed on their soaking steeds to the attack of Voronezh. But Mamontov's and Shkuro's divisions would not accept battle here, either, and hastened to cross the Don in the direction of Kastornaya...

Katya felt as if by now her stomach must be no bigger than a tiny purse. There was only room in it for two ounces of bread, a bite of boiled salt fish and a few spoonfuls of soup. Skirts were just a nuisance—she could hardly keep them on, and she had neither thread to take the waist in with, nor time to sew. Her eyes, on the other hand, had become twice as big as they had been in the autumn, when Matryona had fed her on rich buns.

The little girls at school sometimes said to her, wrinkling their hungry mouths in a sudden gush of feeling:

"How pretty you are, Auntie Katya!"

This caused Katya pleasure, for all her life was in the future. The one souvenir of the past—the emerald ring with its tiny green flame—had been lost long ago, in Vladimirs-koye. She no longer called to memory the beloved shades peopling the dilapidated house on Starokonyushenni Street. But the future, towards which were directed all the hopes and

thoughts of people tormented by hunger, cold, deprivation and war, presented itself to Katya's mind as a broad highway, glistening like glass in the sunshine, on either side of it green meadows and misty lakes surrounded by clumps of trees, holding up their branches to the sun. The road led to a distant, bluish city—intricate, luxurious, exquisite—in which all would find happiness.

One day Katya talked to the children about this during a lesson. They listened with bated breath. It appealed to a sentimental streak in the girls that the road to the future wound its way through green meadows, where they could chase butterflies and pick bunches of tiny, starry flowers. The boys found the story unsatisfactory—Katya had said nothing about trains tearing all over these meadows, past signals, over girder bridges, through tunnels, had not mentioned the colossal chimney stacks from which the smoke would roll so merrily. All were agreed that the city of the future was, of course, blue, with houses touching the very clouds, with incredibly fast trams, with swings on all the boulevards, and booths giving out bread and sausage. "What about ices?" asked Katya. But it appeared that none of the children had ever tasted an ice, or if they had, it had been when they were very little, and they could not remember what it was like.

Katya was obliged to husband her strength. One day, when carrying a full pail into the yard, she had suddenly felt she could hold it no longer, and had had to put it down and lean against the wall to overcome her dizziness. Fortunately nothing had come of the lectures on art: Moscow was getting emptier every day—you might walk from Arbat Square to Strastnoi Square without meeting a single passer-by. But every day now there were bulletins in *Izvestia* announcing military victories. The Red Armies were pouring in a broad stream into the Donbas through the breach in the front at Kastornaya, and peasant risings were rife in the rear of the Whites. At last the end of war and disaster was in sight.

Katya was sitting in her room one evening. Though it was nearly eight she had not lit the night light, for the freshly-kindled "bumblebee" sent enough light through its small half-open door. Seated before it on a low stool, Katya cautiously fed it splinters of wood, which burned up brightly and crackled gaily, being composed of that solar energy Katya had told the children about at school.

She was reading *Crime and Punishment*. Heavens, how hopeless life had been then! Her hand on the pages of the book, Katya gazed into the flames. How terrifying that night spent by Svidrigailov in the wooden tavern on Bolshoi Prospect! It was that very restaurant at which Katya had once been—only once in her life—with Bessonov. Perhaps it had been the very room in which Svidrigailov had passed hour after hour in hopeless procrastination, knowing that he would never overcome his horror and disgust of life.

This curse had been broken, burned, dispersed. And now one could sit calmly reading about the past, putting splinters into the fire, and believing in happiness...

There was a scratching on the door, and a little voice came through the keyhole: "Auntie Katya, are you at home?" It was Klavdia, in enormous felt boots, held together by pieces of string.

"Chesnokova wants you to come—Roshchin is there, from the front."

"Is it very cold out?"

"Awful, Auntie Katya. Such a wind—you can hardly keep your eyes open! If only it would snow, but the snow doesn't come ... what a funny winter! How warm your room is, Auntie Katya!"

...The night wind rushed at them from the dark side street with such force that Katya covered the little girl with the ends of her shawl. Dust stung her face, and loose sheets on the iron roofs clattered. The wind wailed and whistled as if Katya and Klavdia were the last people on the earth, and everything had died, and the sun would never rise over the world any more...

Katya turned her back to the wind to rest beside the dimly lit window of a little wooden house. Through a chink in the curtains she could see a cluttered room, a black pipe protruding at a right angle from the fireplace, the flame of a "bumblebee" in the middle of the room, and a few people seated in armchairs. They were all listening, their heads propped on the palms of their hands, to a youth who stood before them, his snub nose held proudly aloft, reading something from a notebook. His shabby coat was open over his bare chest, and his felt boots, like Klavdia's, were bound round his legs with string. His gestures and the romantic way he had of tossing back his thick, unbrushed hair, told Katya

that the youth was reading poetry. Her heart warmed to him and she smiled as she turned back to face the wind, and ran towards Arbat Street, still holding the shawl over Klavdia.

There were a great many people in Chesnokova's room—most of them were the wives of workers who had gone to the front, but there were a few old men, given places of honour at the table, where the new arrival was speaking about military affairs. They were all plying him with questions, interrupting one another—would it soon be easier to get bread? Could a consignment of wood be expected by Christmas? Were felt boots and sheepskins being issued in the units? Husbands and brothers were mentioned by name—were they alive and well?—as if this military man could know by name all the thousands of workers fighting on all the fronts!

Unable to push her way into the room, Katya waited in the passage. Standing on tiptoe she caught sight of the visitor bending a bandaged head over a sheet of paper to write something down.

"Any more questions, comrades?" he asked, and Katya trembled, as if this quiet stern voice had entered into her very being and rent her heart. She turned instantly, intending to go away. So nothing had ever been forgotten! The sound of this voice, so like that dear one which was for ever silenced, had aroused her former grief, the old, useless pain... Thus it is that long-forgotten memories come back to the lonely in dreams, and a man sees a strange hut in the forest, lit up by dying embers, and beside them his dead mother, sitting smiling as in his distant childhood: he would like to stretch out his arm towards her, to call her back to life, but he cannot touch her, she smiles silently, and he realises that it is only a dream, and tears come from deep within him, swelling the sleeper's bosom.

Something in Katya's face made one of the women in the doorway say:

"Citizens, make way for the teacher, we're hemming her in..."

They made way for Katya to go into the room. As she entered, the man at the table raised his bandaged head, so that she saw his stern face. Before joy had time to light up and widen his dark eyes, Katya staggered. Her head swam, and everything became confused in her mind, so that the

rising hum of voices retreated and the light began to go dark, like the time when she had almost dropped the pail in the doorway... Smiling guiltily, her breath coming fast, her face turning pale, Katya fainted away...

"Katya!" exclaimed the man at the table, pushing his way through the people. "Katya!"

Many hands seized her, not allowing her to fall. Vadim Petrovich took her drooping face between the palms of his hands—so sweet, so dear it was, with the chill, half-open mouth, the eyes rolling upwards beneath the lids.

"She's my wife, comrades, my wife," he said over and over again, with quivering lips...

The wind blew at their backs as they walked. Vadim Petrovich held Katya to him with an arm round her frail shoulders. She cried the whole way, stopping every now and then to kiss him. He had begun to tell her why he had been considered dead, when he had been looking for her all over Russia for a whole year. But it was all so long and confusing, and just now not a bit necessary. Sometimes Katya would exclaim: "Stop, this isn't the way!" and they would turn and roam dark, empty side streets, in which rusty weathercocks creaked on the chimney tops and half-torn sheets of iron rattled on the roofs, while behind a decrepit fence waved its branches an ancient lime tree, which might have seen Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol, terrified of devils, rush by, with streaming coat tails on just such a night as this.

When they got to Starokonyushenni Street Katya said:

"Here's our house—do you remember it? But you always came by the front door. I'm living in the same room, Vadim."

...She lit the lamp, a tiny flame in an empty tin, but quite enough for them to look at one another all night. She unwound her shawl, never taking her eyes off Vadim: he was quite grey, even in his eyebrows there were a few grey hairs; his face was more manly, and wore an expression of stern serenity which was new to her. It was this which charmed her: he was younger, braver, handsomer than the man she remembered in Rostov. Catching sight of his bandage she sighed, her lips parted, emitting a tiny gasp.

"Are you wounded?"

"A mere scratch ... but it got me a fortnight's leave in Moscow... I knew you were here... But how should I ever have found you?" (She smiled joyously and archly, the corners of her mouth rising.) "I almost found you in that village, you know... I was after Krasilnikov..." (Katya's chin trembled, and she tossed her head angrily.) "I killed him, Katya." (She lowered her eyelids, letting her head droop.) "I was beginning to tell you how it happened that you got news of my death, Katya ... as a matter of fact, I *did* die..." (Katya looked at him in alarm, and her great eyes filled with tears again.) "I was travelling by train at night—I had nothing more to live for, I had been mistaken about the main thing, I was quite certain I would either be killed, or commit suicide. Forgive me, Katya, it's hard to say it, but I feel I must ... it was only the thought of you—not love, no, there was no love in me then, but the sheer thought of you, as of a thing which must not be destroyed, cast off, forgotten, which must not be betrayed—that held me back. That night in the train was the wreck of everything in me... Now, when I see familiar faces through my gun sight, I am aware of what black and devastated souls I'm aiming at..."

Katya laid her hands on his shoulders and pressed her cheek to his violently beating heart. They stood there in the middle of the room, he in his unbuttoned greatcoat, she in her outdoor coat. She understood that he was talking of the thing that mattered most of all to him... Dear, wonderful man... He was in a hurry to put himself right in her eyes, so that she should love in him that which was new, honest, austere, passionate... When, in a fit of madness, he had left her in Rostov, she had known he would suffer keenly and come to understand everything... Pressing herself against him she listened to his words, confused and broken, as if he were hastily jotting down in hieroglyphics his overwhelming spiritual sufferings ... but Katya would have understood without words....

"It's an immeasurable task, Katya ... we never dreamed that we would be the ones to fulfil it... Remember all our talks? What a pointless, fatiguing thing we thought the vortex of history, the downfall of great civilizations, ideas which had become pitiful travesties of themselves ... beneath the dress shirt, the same hairy chest of primitive man ... all falsehood! The scales have fallen from our eyes, and we see the whole

of our past life as nothing but falsehood and crime. Russia brought forth a human being. This human being demanded the rights of man for men. This is no dream, it is the Idea, it is on the points of our bayonets, it is altogether practicable... A blinding light has lit up the half-ruined vaults of past centuries ... all is logical and natural ... the aim has been found ... every Red Army man knows it... Do you begin to understand me, Katya? I want you to have the whole of me ... my joy, my heart, my beloved, my star..."

"Katya, Katya!" cried Dasha, bursting into the kitchen. "Katya! My own Katya!" she shouted again, stamping along the passage in her frozen felt boots. She fell upon Katya, seized her, kissed her; then she held her at arm's length, gazed at her passionately, and again fell to squeezing and stroking her. She brought with her a smell of snow, of sheepskins, of black bread. She was in a sheepskin jacket and a peasant woman's shawl, and there was a bundle at her back.

"Katya, my darling, my dear one, my sister... Oh how I've longed for you, dreamed of you... Just think—we had to walk all the way from the Yaroslavl station. Moscow's like a village: silence, crows, snow, footpaths trampled out in the streets ... such a distance! My legs are almost giving way... And Kuzma Kuzmich carried two poods of flour ... we got to Starokonyushenni Street, and then I couldn't find the house! We went up and down the street three times from end to end ... Kuzma Kuzmich said it was the wrong street.... I was simply frantic—how could I have forgotten the house! And all of a sudden ... just fancy! A man appears round the corner—a military man. I went up to him: 'Excuse me, Comrade...' And he stared at me with all his eyes ... my jaw dropped and I sat right down in the snow ... it was Vadim! I thought I must have gone mad ... the dead walking about the streets of Moscow ... and he laughed like anything and started kissing me ... and I couldn't get up... Katya, my pretty one, my clever darling ... why, we have enough to tell each other to last us ten nights... Good heavens, now I remember the room! There's the bed and there's the medicine chest with the Sirens. Vadim's been telling me about Ivan. A hospital train will be leaving for their unit in a few days, and I've decided to join it. I'll go as a nurse and Anisya and Kuzma Kuzmich

will go with me ... we won't leave him here alone, he might get into trouble... We're simply dying for something to eat, Katya... Do put the kettle on! And then we must have a wash... We were a whole week in a goods van coming from Yaroslavl ... we must take off all our clothes and search them thoroughly... We won't come into your room yet, we'll stay in the kitchen. Come in, I'll introduce you to my friends ... what marvellous people, Katya! I owe them my life—everything! We'll heat up the range ourselves and boil the water, there's a whole lot of furniture in there... Haven't you got a single grey hair, Katya? For goodness' sake—you look ten years younger than me... I'm sure the day will come—soon, soon, when we shall all be together...”

In Moscow, oats were being given on ration cards. Never before had the capital of the Republic gone through such a hard time as in the winter of 1920. The Red Army offensive had swallowed up all the vital powers. The grain and coal reserves seized from the Whites had rapidly melted away. The rich provinces which had been overrun by Cossacks and Volunteers were devastated. The workers' food detachments could only find the most insignificant grain surpluses there.

On the anniversary of the Frost Campaign the Volunteer Army fell back on Novorossiisk, strewing the impassable mud of the Kuban steppe with abandoned baggage carts, mud-logged guns, and dead horses. All was over. Anton Ivanovich Denikin, grey-haired and stooping, had sailed away on a French torpedo boat to live the life of an émigré and write his memoirs. The pitiful remnants of the Volunteer regiments were shipped to the Crimea. The Don and Kuban Cossacks had at last realised that they had been cruelly deceived, and had paid for their obstinacy with the nameless graves dotting the steppe from Voronezh to Novorossiisk.

It was still winter in Moscow. The March tempests had piled up the snow in drifts. All the palings and all the furniture that could be spared had long ago been burned up in the “bumblebees”. Plants and factories were at a standstill. Office employees sat in the various departments huddled up in their coats and blowing on their swollen fingers to enable themselves to hold their pencils—the ink was frozen hard in the inkwells, and would not thaw out till the warm weather

came. People walked slowly, never parting with their rucksacks, and there were few who could walk from their houses to their work without stopping to rest against a snowdrift on the way, or turning into some gateway sheltered from the wind. The hunger was appalling—people dreamed of boiled sucking pig on a dish, a sprig of parsley stuck in its grinning mouth and, dreaming, chewed the empty air, imagining they were munching fat ham and hard-boiled eggs. But minds were in a ferment: the stubborn, bloody, strangling monster of counterrevolution had been destroyed, life was following an upward trend, only a few more months of want and suffering, and there would be bread again and the demobilised Red Army would be engaged in peaceful labour—the restoration of what had been destroyed, and the building up of that new life in which all the sufferings, the bitterness of centuries of oppression, would be forgotten...

The faint reddish glow from the hundreds of electric bulbs in the five-tiered auditorium of the Bolshoi Theatre scarcely penetrated the haze of human breath. It was as cold as a tomb. On the vast stage, the wings shut off by canvas arches, was the table of the presidium, a little to the side and not far from the dim footlights. All heads were turned towards the back of the stage, where a map of European Russia, almost the whole surface of which was covered with dots and circles, hung from the flies. In front of the map stood a small man in a fur coat, bareheaded: his hair, thrown back from the great forehead, cast a shadow on the map. He held a long billiard cue in one hand, and now and then, drawing his thick eyebrows together, pointed with the tip of the cue to one of the coloured circles, which immediately flashed out in such brilliant light that the tarnished gilt decorations of the hall gleamed, and tense, gaunt faces, eyes wide with attention, became suddenly visible.

His high voice floated over the tense silence.

"We have billions of poods of air-dried peat in European Russia alone. We have guaranteed reserves for centuries. Peat is local fuel. Twenty-five times more power can be got from an acre of peat bog than from an acre of forest land. Peat occupies the first place—closely followed by water power and coal—in the solution of the problem of revolutionary

construction facing us. A revolution which only conquered on the field of battle and did not at once start putting its theories into practice, would peter out like a gust of wind. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who is seated amongst us, is the inspirer of my today's report, and has created a formula for the development of revolution: Communism is Soviet rule plus electrification..."

"Which one is Lenin?" asked Katya, looking down from the height of the fifth gallery. Roshchin, who kept hold of her thin hand the whole time, whispered back:

"The one in the black coat—see, he's writing something very quickly, now he's lifted his head and thrown a note across the table ... that's him ... and the thin one at the end, with a black moustache is Stalin, the one who crushed Denikin..."

The lecturer was saying:

"Where thousands of millions of poods of peat are hidden in the eternal stillness of Russia, where a waterfall descends, or a powerful river rushes by, we are erecting power stations—veritable lighthouses for communalised labour. Russia has shaken off for ever the yoke of the exploiters, it is our task to illuminate our country with the steady glow of an electric campfire. The curse of labour must become the blessing of labour."

Raising the cue, he pointed to the future power stations, lightly touching the circles standing for the new centres of civilisation, and the circles responded by flashing like stars in the dusk of the vast stage. In order to light up the map for these brief moments, the entire energy of the Moscow power station had to be concentrated in the hall, and even in the Kremlin, in the offices of the People's Commissars, all the lamps had been unscrewed, with the exception of a 16-candle bulb.

The people in the auditorium, in the pockets of whose military greatcoats and bullet-riddled tunics were handfuls of oats, issued instead of bread that day, held their breath as they listened to the dizzy but fully practicable prospects of the revolution, now entering on the path of creation...

"He knows what he's talking about," Telegin said quietly to Dasha. "I know him well, it's engineer Krzhizhanovsky. When the war's over I'm going back to the works, I have a few ideas of my own... Oh, Dasha, how I'm longing to get

back to work! If they provide a power base like that—there's nothing we won't be able to do... The wealth we possess—you have no idea! If we handle it properly we shall leave America far behind. We're ever so much richer... You shall go to the Urals with me..."

And Dasha answered him:

"And we'll live in a log house, as clean as clean, with drops of resin, and big windows... There'll be a big fire in the grate on winter mornings..."

Roshchin—whispering in Katya's ear:

"Do you realise the significance this gives to all our efforts, to the blood that has been shed, the unknown, silent sufferings...? The world will be rearranged for the common welfare... Everyone in this hall is ready to give his life for this... It's not just an idea of mine. They could show you scars and the bluish spots left by bullets... And this—in my native land, and this is Russia..."

"The die had been cast," said the man at the map, leaning on his cue, as on a spear. "We are fighting at the barricades for our own rights and the rights of the rest of the world—to put an end once and for all to the exploitation of man by man."

1920-1941

Translated by Ivy and Tatiana Litvinov

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Sholokhov". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

(b. 1905, Kruzhilin village, Vyoshenskaya stanitsa
near Rostov)

The future Nobel Prize winner Mikhail Sholokhov was born in a peasant family on the Don, among Cossacks. He was quite young when the grim ordeal of the Civil War descended on his country. Sholokhov took an active part in it and was twice saved from the firing squad by a lucky chance. On arriving in Moscow in 1922, he worked as a freight-handler, a navvy, and a clerk, and became a member of the Young Guard literary group. His short stories and satirical articles on topics of the day began to appear in the Young Communist League newspapers and magazines. In 1926 he published two volumes of stories: TALES OF THE DON and THE AZURE STEPPE.

In the mid-twenties Sholokhov returned to the Don, moved to the stanitsa of Vyoshenskaya, which has since been his permanent home, and began to write QUIET FLOWS THE DON (which he completed in 1940).

Social realities (collectivisa-

tion and the enormous effect it had on the life of the Cossacks) prompted him to temporarily put aside this main work of his life, and in the early 1930s he produced the first part of the novel *VIRGIN SOIL UPTURNED*. (The second part of this novel was completed and published in 1960).

Sholokhov is also famous for his story *THE FATE OF A MAN* (1956), some journalistic writings, and a novel about the Great Patriotic War *THEY FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY*, which has not yet been completed.

But even if Sholokhov had written nothing but *QUIET FLOWS THE DON*, he would still have won renown in the history of world literature for this, the most outstanding novel of the 20th century.

There is no need here to argue with the critics who try to reduce the significance of *QUIET FLOWS THE DON* to a portrayal of the varying fortunes of the imperialist war and the Civil War in Russia, and particularly on the Don. They are right, of course, in the sense that the novel gives a historically accurate and very broad picture of the life of the Russian Cossacks. But this book of world-historic significance cannot be confined in such narrow local limits.

QUIET FLOWS THE DON is a milestone in world literature and has exerted an immense influence on its development. Its impact lay mainly in its contribution to the democratisation of art. It is significant that

this epic appeared in the 20th century, the century of revolutions and the collapse of the colonial system, when it became clear that every human being is a world in himself, a whole universe. Every human being, and not just the chosen few! On a psychological level that was once reserved for those few Sholokhov was able to show that "ordinary" people, working people, were capable of emotions no less powerful and thoughts about life no less complex and agonising than those of the intellectually educated.

The tragedy of Grigory Melekhov, the central character in this epic novel, a truth-seeker by nature, is that he is prepared to give his life in defence of justice, but he cannot decide where a just order of things is to be found in the world. He is a collectivist by nature, but his collectivism is narrow, restricted by considerations of class and caste, and it clashes violently with the interests of the working people.

When Grigory realises this, he honestly and sincerely throws in his lot with the Red forces. But life is complex and old relations have a strong hold on him. Grigory changes sides more than once, and eventually falls in with a band made up of the dregs of society. Spiritually exhausted and longing for peace of mind, he leaves the band, comes back to his unforgettable love Aksinya with the intention of running away with her to some place where no one knows them, and where two people who have lost everything can

begin life anew. But a chance bullet cuts short Aksinya's troubled life.

Sholokhov's mighty talent is the best confirmation of what people are capable of when uplifted by a wave of heroic popular struggle and endowed with a lofty view of the human purpose. There are few writers of the 20th century whose artistic power and psychological insight can be compared with Sholokhov's. His epic novel is an endless source of inspiration to world art in the 20th century.

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Quiet Flows the Don

(An excerpt)

Long before dawn he rode into the meadow on the far bank opposite Tatarsky. Farther downstream, where the Don was shallower, he stripped naked, tied his clothes, boots and weapons to the horses' heads and, holding his cartridge pouch in his teeth, started to swim the river together with the horses. The water seared him with its unbearable cold. In an effort to keep warm he struck out vigorously with his right arm, holding the tied bridles in his left hand and quietly encouraging the groaning, snorting horses.

On reaching the bank he dressed hurriedly, tightened the saddle girths and, to warm the horses, set off at a gallop towards the village. The wet greatcoat, wet saddle flaps and wet shirt chilled his body. His teeth chattered, shivers coursed down his spine and his whole body began to shake, but the fast riding soon warmed him and he approached the village at a walk, looking round on all sides and listening intently. He decided to leave the horses in a deep ravine. As he made his way down to the bottom, their hooves clattered sharply on the stones and fiery sparks flew out from under the shoes.

Grigory tethered the horses to a withered elm he had known since childhood and walked into the village.

And here it was, the old Melekhov farmstead, the dark shapes of the apple-trees, the well-sweep pointing up to the Great Bear.... Panting with agitation, Grigory walked down toward the Don, cautiously climbed the fence of the Astakhovs' yard and went up to the unshuttered window. He could hear only the rapid pounding of his heart and the dull roar of blood in his head. He tapped quietly on the window frame, so quietly that he himself scarcely heard the sound. Aksinya came silently to the window and peered out. He saw her clasp her hands to her breast and heard the faint moan that broke from her lips. Grigory signed to her to open the window and slung the rifle off his shoulder. She threw open both frames.

"Quiet! Don't open the door, I'll come in through the window," Grigory whispered.

He climbed on to the coping. Aksinya's bare arms twined round his neck. Those dear arms, they trembled and throbbed so violently on his shoulders that he began to tremble with them.

"Ksyusha ... wait ... take the rifle," he muttered, barely able to speak.

With one hand steadying his sabre, Grigory stepped in over the windowsill and closed the window.

He was about to take Aksinya in his arms, but she sank heavily to her knees before him, clasped his legs and pressed her face to his wet greatcoat, her whole body shaking with suppressed weeping. He lifted her up and seated her on a bench. Aksinya silently buried her face on his chest, shaking convulsively and biting the lapel of his greatcoat so as not to waken the children with her sobbing.

So even Aksinya, with all her strength, had broken under the burden. Life must have been hard for her in these last months.... Grigory fondled the hair that had fallen loose down her back, her hot, damp forehead. He let all her tears come, then asked, "Are the children safe and well?"

"Yes."

"And Dunyashka?"

"Dunyashka.... Yes, she's alive... and well."

"Is Mikhail at home? Give over now! Stop crying, my shirt's wet through from your tears. Ksyusha! Darling! That's enough! We've not time for crying. Is Mikhail at home?"

Aksinya wiped her face and pressed Grigory's cheeks between her wet hands. Smiling through her tears and not taking her eyes off her beloved, she said quietly, "I won't cry any more... I'm not crying now. Mikhail's away. He's been in Vyoshenskaya for more than a month now, serving in some unit or other. Go and look at the children! We never expected to see you, that we didn't!"

Mishatka and Polyushka were sleeping on the bed, arms and legs flung out. Grigory bent over them, stood looking at them for a while, then tiptoed away and sat down silently beside Aksinya.

"But what about you?" she asked in an ardent whisper. "How did you get here? Where have you been all this time? Suppose they catch you?"

"I've come to fetch you. They won't catch me, I reckon. Will you come with me?"

"Where to?"

"With me. I've left the band. I was with Fomin. Heard of him?"

"Yes. But where can we go?"

"South. To the Kuban or farther. We'll live somehow, we won't starve, will we? I won't jib at any work. That's what my hands need—work, not fighting. I've been eating my heart out over these last months. But we'll talk about that later."

"What about the children?"

"We'll leave them with Dunyashka. Then see what happens. We can take them later. Well? Will you come?"

"Grisha... Grisha, darling..."

"No tears! That's enough now! We'll do our crying together later on, when there's time. Get yourself ready, my horses are waiting in the ravine. Well? Will you come?"

"What would you think?" Aksinya burst out, then glanced at the children, pressing her hand to her lips in fright. "What would you think?" she repeated in a whisper. "D'you think it's been easy for me here alone? I'll come, Grisha, my love! I'd walk, I'd crawl after you, but I won't stay here alone any more! There's no life for me without you... Better kill me than leave me behind again!"

She hugged Grigory with all her strength. He kissed her, glancing at the window. The summer nights were short. They must hurry.

"Won't you rest for a bit?" Aksinya asked.

"What!" he exclaimed. "It'll soon be light, we've got to go now. Put your clothes on and call Dunyashka. We'll settle things with her. We've got to get as far as Dry Dell, while it's still dark. We'll hide in the woods there for the day, then go on at night. Can you ride a horse?"

"Goodness, I'd ride anything! I keep wondering if this is a dream or is it really happening. I've often dreamed about you and you're always different...." Aksinya combed her hair hurriedly, holding the pins in her teeth and speaking quietly, almost inaudibly. She dressed quickly and walked to the door.

"Shall I wake the children? You could at least have a look at them."

"No, don't," Grigory said resolutely.

He took his pouch out of his cap and started making a cigarette, but as soon as Aksinya had gone out he stepped

quickly to the bed and lavished long kisses on the children, then he recalled Natalya and a lot more from his ill-fortuned life, and gave way to tears.

Straight from the threshold Dunyashka burst out, "Well, hullo, brother dear! So you're home at last! After all your roaming...."

And she fell into lamentations. "So this is the father the children have waited for so long! Orphans with a living father...."

Grigory embraced her and said sternly, "Be quiet, you'll wake the little ones! Drop that, sister! I've heard it all before! I've enough tears and sorrow of my own to get on with.... That's not what I called you in for. Will you take the children and look after them?"

"And you? Where are you going?"

"I'm going away and taking Aksinya with me. Will you take the children? When I get work, I'll come and fetch them."

"Well, of course, I will. If both of you are going, I'll have to take them. They can't be left out in the street and you can't put them on strangers."

Grigory silently kissed Dunyashka, then said, "My deepest thanks to you, sister! I knew you wouldn't refuse."

Dunyashka sat down on the chest without replying.

"When are you leaving? Now?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What about the house? The farm?"

Aksinya answered uncertainly. "It's up to you. Take in some lodgers or do what you think best. Anything that's left of the clothes or household things you can move over to your own place."

"But what shall I tell other people? What shall I say when they ask what's become of you?"

"Say you don't know and that's all there is to it." Grigory turned to Aksinya. "Ksyusha, hurry up and get ready. Don't take much. Just a warm jacket and a few skirts, whatever underwear you've got, and food for the first few days. That's all."

Day was just breaking when they came out on the porch after saying good-bye to Dunyashka and kissing the children, who still had not woken up. They walked down to the Don and made their way along the bank to the ravine.

"We once went off to Yagodnoye like this," Grigory said.

"Only then your bundle was bigger, and we were younger."

Full of joyful excitement, Aksinya glanced sideways at Grigory.

"I'm still afraid this may be a dream. Give me your hand to touch, I just can't believe it." She laughed softly and leaned on Grigory's shoulder as they walked.

He saw her tear-swollen eyes shining with happiness, her cheeks, pale in the dawn shadows and a tender smile appeared on his lips. "There's a fine woman for you," he thought. "She got ready and came with me as if she was going to a party. Nothing frightens her!"

And as if in answer to his thoughts, Aksinya said, "See what kind of a woman I am! You had only to whistle me like a dog and I came running after you. It's love and pining for you, Grisha, that have tied me like this.... I'm only sorry for the little ones, I don't care a rap for myself. I'd go anywhere to be with you, even to death!"

At the sound of their footsteps the horses neighed quietly. Dawn was rushing upon them. A strip of sky on the eastern horizon was already faintly pink. The mist over the Don had risen off the water.

Grigory untethered the horses and helped Aksinya to mount. The stirrups were rather too long for her. Vexed at his lack of foresight, he shortened them and mounted the second horse.

"Keep up behind me, Ksyusha! When we get out of the ravine, we'll gallop. It won't jog you so much. Don't ride with a loose rein. The horse you've got doesn't like that. And mind your knees. He's troublesome at times, tries to snap at your knee. Well, off we go!"

It was about eight versts to Dry Dell. They covered the distance rapidly and by sunrise they were approaching the forest. Grigory dismounted on the edge of the forest and helped Aksinya out of the saddle.

"Well? Riding's hard when you're not used to it, eh?" he asked with a smile.

Flushed from the gallop, Aksinya answered him with her flashing dark eyes.

"It's fine! Better than walking. Only my legs...." She smiled in confusion. "Turn away, Grisha, and I'll have a look. The skin's tingling ... I must have rubbed them."

"That's nothing, it'll go off," Grigory assured her. "Walk

about a bit, your legs are trembling.” And he screwed up his eyes in an affectionately mocking smile. “Call yourself a Cossack woman!”

He chose a clearing at the lower end of the dell, and said, “This is where our camp will be. Make yourself comfortable, Ksyusha!”

He unsaddled the horses, hobbled them and hid the saddles and weapons in the bushes. The heavy dew had turned the grass a bluish grey. On the slopes, where the morning darkness still lingered, it looked almost blue. Orange bumblebees were dozing in the half-open cups of the flowers. Larks were trilling high above the steppe, and from wheatfields and the dense sweet-scented steppeland grass came the steady piping of quails: “Time to sleep! Time to sleep!” Grigory pushed down the grass under a bush of young oak and lay back, resting his head on one of the saddles. The steady piping of the quails, the drowsy song of the larks, the warm wind from the sands on the other side of the Don that had not cooled during the night, all lulled him to sleep. And surely it was time. He had not slept for several nights running. Persuaded by the quails, he gave in to sleep and closed his eyes. Aksinya sat beside him in silence, thoughtfully pulling the violet petals off a sprig of wild honeysuckle with her lips.

“Grisha, no one will catch us here, will they?” she asked softly, touching Grigory’s bearded cheek with the stem of the flower.

He dragged himself out of drowsy oblivion and said huskily, “There’s no one about in the steppe. This is the quiet season. I’ll have a sleep, Ksyusha, and you mind the horses. I’m so sleepy.... Haven’t slept for three days.... We’ll talk later....”

“Sleep, my dearest, sleep well.”

Aksinya bent over Grigory, drew aside the lock of hair that had fallen over his forehead, and pressed her lips gently to his cheeks.

“Grisha, darling, how many grey hairs you have now,” she whispered. “You must be getting old? Not long ago you were just a lad.” And with a sad little smile she gazed into Grigory’s face.

He was sleeping with his lips slightly parted and breathing steadily. His black eyelashes, sun-bleached at the tips, quivered slightly and his upper lip stirred, revealing firmly

clenched white teeth. Aksinya's gaze grew more attentive and only now did she notice how much he had changed in the months since they had parted. There was something harsh, almost cruel in the deep furrows between his brows, in the folds round his mouth, in the jutting cheekbones. And for the first time it struck her that he must be terrible in battle, on horseback with bared sabre. Her eyes dropped to his big knotty hands and for some reason she sighed.

After a while Aksinya rose quietly and crossed the clearing, lifting her skirt high to keep it out of the dew-drenched grass. Somewhere not far away a stream was playing noisily over stones. She went down to the bottom of the dell, which was strewn with mossy green boulders, drank the cool spring water, washed her face and wiped her pink, refreshed cheeks with her kerchief. All the time a gentle smile hovered on her lips. Grigory was with her again! Once again she had felt the lure of the unknown with its phantasmal vision of happiness. What tears she had shed through all her sleepless nights, what grief she had suffered in the last few months. Only the day before, when the women weeding their potatoes on the patch next to hers had struck up a sad song, her heart had contracted painfully and she could not help listening.

*Come home, grey geese, come home,
Time your swimming was done,
And time my crying was done—
Woman, crying alone...*

a woman sang the lament in a high-pitched voice, and Aksinya had been unable to restrain herself. The tears had simply spurted from her eyes! She had hoped to forget everything in work and bury the despair that had stirred in her heart, but the tears misted her eyes, and dripped steadily on the green potato leaves, on her helpless arms, and she could neither see nor work. She dropped the hoe, lay on the ground, hid her face in her hands, and let the tears flow freely....

Only yesterday she had cursed her life, and everything around her had seemed grey and joyless as a cloudy day, and yet today the whole world seemed to her as jubilant and bright as after a refreshing summer rain. "We, too, will find our share of happiness," she thought, gazing absently at the patterned oak leaves as they caught the slanting rays of the rising sun.

Round the bushes and on the sunny patches there was a wealth of colourful sweet-scented flowers. Aksinya gathered an armful, sat down quietly beside Grigory and, remembering her youth, began to weave a wreath. It turned out well. She sat for a long time admiring it, then added a few pink sweetbrier blossoms and placed it at Grigory's head.

At about nine o'clock Grigory was awakened by the neighing of horses. He sat up in fright, groping for his weapons.

"There's no one about," Aksinya said quietly. "Why are you so afraid?"

Grigory rubbed his eyes and smiled sleepily.

"When you've learned to live like a hare, you keep one eye open even when you're asleep, and jump at every little sound. You can't get out of the habit so easily, girl. Have I slept for long?"

"No. Perhaps you'll sleep some more?"

"I'd have to sleep all day to make up for what I've lost. Let's have breakfast. The bread and the knife are in my saddle bags. You find them while I go and water the horses."

He stood up, took off his greatcoat and worked his shoulders. The sun was beating down fiercely. The wind stirred the leaves of the trees and their rustle drowned the gentle murmur of the spring.

Grigory went down to the water, made a dam out of twigs and stones, and dug up some soil with his sabre to fill in the chinks. When the water had risen in his pond, he fetched the horses and let them drink, then took off their bridles and again put them out to graze.

While they were eating, Aksinya asked, "Where shall we be going from here?"

"To Morozovskaya. We'll ride as far as Platov, then walk."

"What about the horses?"

"We'll leave them behind."

"What a pity, Grisha! They're such good horses. The grey's a beauty! Must we leave them? Where did you get them?"

"I got them..." Grigory smiled wryly. "I robbed a Ukrainian."

After a slight pause he said, "Pity or not, we've got to leave them behind. This is no time for us to be horse trading."

"And why are you carrying arms? What good are they to

us? God forbid, but if someone sees them, we'll be in trouble."

"Who will see us at night? I kept them just in case. I feel a bit scared now without them.... When we abandon the horses we'll abandon the arms. They won't be needed any more then."

After breakfast they lay down on Grigory's greatcoat. He fought vainly against sleep while Aksinya, leaning on her elbow, told him how she had lived and all that she had been through in his absence. Through an overpowering drowsiness Grigory heard her steady voice, but his heavy eyelids just wouldn't open. At times he ceased to hear her voice altogether. It would grow fainter and die away, and then he would give a sudden start and wake up, only to close his eyes again after a few minutes. Weariness was stronger than both desire and will.

"...they missed you, they kept asking, where's Daddy? I tried everything, I was as kind as I could be. They got used to me and stopped going in to see Dunyashka so often. Polyushka is a quiet little girl, and obedient. I'd make her a few rag dolls and she would sit with them under the table, busy as can be. But Mishatka came running in from the street one day, trembling all over. 'What's the matter?' I ask him. And he burst out crying, and so bitterly. 'The other boys won't play with me! Your farther's a bandit, they say. Mummy, is it true? What are bandits like?' So I tell him, 'Your father's no bandit. He's just ... just unlucky.' And then he kept on at me with his questions: Why is he unlucky? What does unlucky mean? But I can't explain it to him.... They started calling me mother of their own accord, Grisha, don't think I taught them. Mikhail was all right with them, he was kind. He wouldn't even say hullo to me, just turned his head away and walked past, but once or twice he brought them some sugar from the stanitsa. Prokhor was always grieving for you. That man's done for, he said. Last week he came in to talk to me about you and burst into tears.... They searched my place, looking for weapons. They looked everywhere—under the eaves, in the cellar, everywhere...."

Grigory fell asleep without hearing the rest of the story. Over his head the leaves of a young elm whispered in the wind. Yellow blobs of light glided over his face. Aksinya pressed long kisses on his closed eyes, and then she herself

went to sleep, resting her cheek against Grigory's arm and smiling in her sleep.

* * *

They left Dry Dell late at night, when the moon had risen. After two hours' riding, they descended a slope towards the River Chir. The corn crakes were crying in the meadows, frogs were croaking fit to burst in the rushy backwaters, and from far away came the muffled moan of a bittern.

There were orchards all along the bank, dark and unfriendly in the mist.

Not far from a small bridge Grigory halted. Complete silence reigned over the village. Grigory touched his horse with his heels and turned aside. He had felt a sudden impulse not to cross the bridge. He did not trust this stillness, he feared it. They forded the stream on the edge of the village, and had just turned into a narrow lane, when a man rose from the ditch. The next moment three more appeared.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Grigory jerked back from the shout as if he had been struck in the face, and reined in his horse. Recovering himself instantly, he responded loudly: "Friends!" And as he wheeled his horse sharply, he managed to whisper to Aksinya, "Turn back! Follow me!"

The four sentries from a grain-requisitioning detachment that had just taken up their quarters for the night in the village, advanced silently slowly towards them. One stopped to light a cigarette. He struck a match. At that moment Grigory brought his whip down hard on Aksinya's horse. It leapt forward and broke straight into a gallop. Crouching over his horse's neck, Grigory galloped after it. The silence lasted a few long, agonising seconds, then a ragged, rumbling volley crashed out like a clap of thunder and spurts of fire pierced the darkness. Grigory heard the hot whistle of bullets and a long-drawn shout:

"To arms!"

Some two hundred paces from the stream Grigory caught up with Aksinya's grey horse that was swinging along with great strides and, as he drew level, shouted, "Keep your head down, Ksyusha! Keep low!"

Aksinya drew rein and, even as she leaned back, slipped

sideways. Grigory managed to hold her or she would have fallen.

"Are you wounded?! Where? Speak!" Grigory asked hoarsely.

She said nothing, only leaning more and more heavily on his arm. Holding her close as they galloped, Grigory whispered panting, "For the Lord's sake! Just a word! What has happened to you?!"

But not a word or a groan came from her silent lips.

About two versts from the village Grigory turned sharply off the track, rode down into a steep ravine, dismounted and, taking Aksinya in his arms, laid her carefully on the ground.

He took off her warm jacket, tore the light cotton blouse and shift from her breast, and felt for the wound. The bullet had entered her left shoulder, smashed the shoulder blade and come out under the right collar-bone. With bloodied, trembling hands Grigory rummaged in the saddle bags for a clean shift and a field dressing. He lifted Aksinya, propped her on his knee, bandaged the wound, trying to stop the blood that was gushing from under the collar-bone. The strips of cloth and bandage were soon soaked black. The blood was also flowing from Aksinya's half-open mouth, gurgling in her throat. And with deathly horror in his heart Grigory realised that it was all over, that the most terrible thing that could have happened in his life had already happened.

He walked carefully down the steep slope of the ravine, down a path sprinkled with sheeps' droppings, carrying Aksinya in his arms. Her head lay helplessly on his shoulder. He heard her whistling, choked breathing and felt the blood leaving her body and flowing out of her mouth on to his chest. The two horses followed him down into the ravine. Snorting and jingling their bridles, they began to munch the lush grass.

Aksinya died in Grigory's arms not long before dawn. Consciousness never returned to her. He silently kissed her on lips that were cold and salty with blood, lowered her gently to the grass and stood up. An unknown force struck him in the chest. He staggered and fell over on his back, but sprang to his feet again in terror. And once again he fell, striking his bare head painfully on a stone. Then, without rising from his knees, he drew his sabre from its sheath and began to dig a grave. The earth was damp and yielding. He

tried to hurry, but his throat tightened till he almost choked and, gasping for breath, he tore his shirt open. The morning freshness cooled his sweating chest and now it was not so hard for him to work. He scooped out the soil with his hands and sabre, not resting for a minute, but it was a long time before the grave was waist-deep.

He buried his Aksinya by the bright light of morning. As she lay in the grave he folded her dark deathly pale arms on her chest and covered her face with her kerchief, so that the earth should not fall into her half-open eyes that gazed up motionlessly at the sky and were already beginning to lose their brightness. He bid her farewell, firmly believing that they would not be parted for long....

With his hands he carefully pressed down the damp yellow clay on the grave mound and for a long time knelt beside it, with his head bowed, swaying slowly to and fro.

Now he had nothing to hurry for. This was the end.

The sun rose over the ravine in the dusty murk of a dry wind. Its rays silvered the thick strands of grey on Grigory's bared head and glided over his pale and frighteningly set face. As though awakening from a horrible dream, he raised his head and saw above him a black sky and the blindingly bright black disk of the sun.

* * *

In the early spring, when the snow has gone and the winter-bowed grass had dried out, the spring fires begin. The flames driven by the wind stream across the steppe, gobble the dry timothy, leap up the tall stalks of the thistle, slither over the brownish tops of the mugwort, and spread out over the hollows.... And for long afterwards the steppe smells acridly of the scorched, cracked earth. All around, the young grass grows merrily green, the countless larks flutter in the blue sky above it, the passing geese feed on the lush herbs, and the bustards that have come for the summer build their nests there. But where the fires have been, the charred earth lies black and threatening. No bird nests there, the wild animals shun it and only the swift-winged wind sweeps across and carries the grey-blue ash and dark bitter dust far away.

Grigory's life was now as black as the fire-scorched steppe, bereft of everything that was dear to his heart. Ruthless death

had taken all, destroyed all. Only the children remained. And yet he himself still clung convulsively to the earth, as though his broken life were still of some value to himself and others....

When he had buried Aksinya, he roamed aimlessly about the steppe for three days, but he neither went home, nor to Vyoshenskaya to ask for pardon. On the fourth day he left his horses in one of the homesteads of the Ust-Khopyorskaya stanitsa, crossed the Don and set off on foot for the Slashchevskaya oak forest, on the fringe of which Fomin's band had suffered its first defeat in April. Even then, in April, he had heard that some deserters had a permanent camp in the forest. Not wishing to go back to Fomin, Grigory decided to join them.

For several days he roamed about the huge forest. Though tortured by hunger, he hesitated to approach any house or village. With the death of Aksinya he had lost both his reason and his former daring. The snap of a breaking branch, a rustle from the thickets, the cry of a bird at night, everything plunged him into fear and confusion. For food he had only the wild strawberries, that were not yet ripe, some tiny mushrooms, and the leaves of the hazel nut. He grew gaunt and haggard. Towards the end of the fifth day some of the deserters came across him and took him to their dug-out.

There were seven of them. All local men, they had been living in the forest since the previous autumn, when mobilisation had begun. They had made a proper home for themselves in the roomy dug-out and hardly lacked for anything. They often went to see their families at night and came back with bread, biscuit, millet, flour and potatoes. Meat they obtained without much difficulty in other villages, sometimes stealing cattle.

One of the deserters, who had once served in the 12th Cossack Regiment, recognised Grigory and he was accepted without much wrangling.

* * *

Grigory lost count of the dreary, endless days. Until October he put up with life in the forest, but when the autumn rains began, and then the frosts, his longing for the

children, for his native village revived with fresh and unexpected force.

To while away the time, he would sit for days on end on his bunk in the dug-out, carving wooden spoons and bowls and skilfully fashioning human figures and animals out of the softer woods. He tried not to think at all, to seal his heart to the poisonous misery of grief. In the daytime he succeeded, but during the long winter nights he was overcome by the anguish of recall. He would toss and turn on the wooden bunk, unable to fall asleep. During the day none of the men in the dug-out heard a word of complaint from him, but at night he would often wake up trembling and pass his hand over his face to find his cheeks and the thick beard that had grown in these six months wet with tears.

He often dreamed of the children, of Aksinya, of his mother and other dear ones who were no longer among the living. His whole life was in the past and the past seemed but a brief and oppressive dream. If only I could go back home just once more, just to see the children, then I could die as I must, he often thought to himself....

In early spring Chumakov made an unexpected appearance. He was wet to the waist but as cheerful and restless as ever. When he had dried his clothes by the stove and got himself warm, he sat down beside Grigory on the bunk.

"Well, we've done a lot of roaming since you left us, Melekhov! We've been as far as Astrakhan and out in the Kalmyk steppes.... Aye, we've seen a lot of the wide world! And the amount of blood we've shed—other people's, I mean! They took Fomin's wife hostage and grabbed all his property. That got him real mad and he ordered us to cut down anyone who served Soviet power. So we started doing just that: teachers, doctors, agronomists—the whole bloody lot! And not long ago they finished us off," he said with a sigh and a sudden shiver. "First they routed us at Tishanskaya and a week ago they did it again, at Solomny. During the night they surrounded us on three sides and left only one way out, up the hill, and there the snow was real deep, up to the horses' bellies.... At daybreak they opened up with their machine-guns and that was it.... They mowed down the lot of us. I and Fomin's little son were the only two that got away. You see, Fomin had been carting his boy Davydka round with him ever since autumn. Fomin himself was killed.... I saw it

with my own eyes. The first bullet hit him in the leg and smashed the knee-cap, the second snicked his head. Three times he fell off his horse. We'd stop and lift him into the saddle, but he'd ride on for a bit, then fall again. The third bullet finished him, hit him in the side.... Then we had to leave him. I galloped on a bit farther and looked back and two horsemen were already slashing him where he lay...."

"Well, that was how it was bound to be," Grigory said indifferently.

Chumakov spent the night with them and in the morning started taking his leave.

"Where are you off to?" Grigory asked.

Smiling, Chumakov answered, "To find myself an easy life. Mebbe you'll come with me?"

"No, go your own way."

"Yes, this is no life for me. Your trade, Melekhov—carving these spoons and bowls—wouldn't suit me," Chumakov said mockingly, doffing his cap and bowing. "Christ save you, peaceable brigands, for your hospitality and shelter. May the good God give you a cheerful life because it's pretty glum here with you. You live in the woods and pray to your stolen goods—d'you call that life?"

After Chumakov's departure Grigory lived in the forest for another week, then made ready for the road.

"Going home?" one of the deserters asked him.

And for the first time since he came to the forest Grigory gave a faint smile.

"Yes."

"Why don't you stay on till spring? Come May Day, they'll give us an amnesty, then we'll all be on our way."

"No, I can't wait," Grigory replied and said goodbye all round.

Next morning he reached the Don opposite the village of Tatarsky. For a long time he stood gazing at his own home, pale with a joyous excitement. Then he slipped his rifle and field bag off his shoulder, took out the hussif, the hemp waste, and the bottle of gun oil, and for some reason counted the cartridges. There were twelve clips and twenty-six lying loose.

At the steep cliff the ice had drifted away from the bank. The clear green water was lapping round it, breaking the needles of ice along the edge. Grigory dropped his rifle and

revolver into the water, then tipped out the cartridges and carefully wiped his hands on his greatcoat.

Downstream from the village he crossed the dark-blue ice of March, which was already porous and pitted by a sudden thaw, and strode on towards the house. From a distance he saw little Mishatka on the slope above the pier and could barely restrain himself from running towards him.

Mishatka was breaking off the icicles dangling from a rock, throwing them, and studiously watching the blue fragments rolling away down the hill.

Grigory reached the slope and, panting for breath, called out hoarsely, "Mishatka!... My son!"

The little boy gave him a frightened look and lowered his eyes. He had recognised his father in this bearded terrible-looking man.

All the fond and tender words that Grigory had whispered through the long nights in the forest, when recalling his children, now fled from his memory. He kneeled and kissed his son's pink cold little hands and in a choking voice could repeat only one word, "Son ... son...."

Then he picked the boy up in his arms and, gazing with dry, frenziedly burning eyes into his face, asked, "How are you all here? How is Auntie, and Polyushka? Are they alive and well?"

Still not looking at his father, Mishatka replied quietly, "Auntie Dunya is well, but Polyushka died last autumn.... Of scarlet fever. And Uncle Mikhail is in the army."

And so it had come about, the one small thing that Grigory had longed for through his sleepless nights. He was standing at the gate of his own home, holding his son in his arms....

This was all he had left, all that still made him kin with the earth and with this whole wide world shining under the cold sun.

1926-1940

Translated by Robert Daglish

F. Gladkov

(b. 1883, village of Chernavka
near Saratov—
d. 1958, Moscow)

Fyodor Gladkov had to earn his living from his childhood onwards but he nevertheless managed to enroll in the town college and to graduate from it as a primary school teacher. He became an active member of the Bolshevik Party and an underground worker in 1906. As a result he was arrested and spent three years in exile. During the White Guard rule over his home town, he went underground again. However, long before he devoted himself to Party work, Fyodor Gladkov had tried his hand at writing. This artistic vein pulsed in Fyodor Gladkov even in the most difficult times of his life as a professional revolutionary. The novel CEMENT came out in 1925, eight years after the Revolution, and immediately won Gladkov broad recognition. It was, in fact, the first large-scale work about the problems—urgent ones!—of the new peaceful life to be published after the Civil War. These problems included the need to restore production that had come to an almost complete halt

as a result of the devastation wrought by the Civil War, the need to make sense of the new relations between men and women as they advanced towards the equality that the revolution had brought, the need to review the opinions held about the old intelligentsia, and so on.

It was Maxim Gorky who first appreciated the importance of CEMENT. "This is a very important book," he wrote, "and a very good one. It is the first book since the Revolution to deal solidly and clearly with that most important theme of the present day—labour. The characters are also very successful. Gleb is clearly defined as a character and, although he is romanticised, that is how it should be. Dasha is also successful."

Of Fyodor Gladkov's numerous other works, special mention should be made of his autobiographical trilogy A STORY OF CHILDHOOD (1949), WORKERS FOR HIRE (1950), and HARD YEAR (1954). The trilogy—in which Gladkov looks back at his childhood from the height of his experience—was extremely popular in the postwar years.

In his autobiographical trilogy Fyodor Gladkov based himself on the traditions founded by Maxim Gorky in his autobiographical trilogy. In fact, one can even go so far as to say that Fyodor Gladkov's writings expanded and gave form to the creative principles left to the Soviet Union's writers by the founder of socialist realist literature.

Cement

1. THE FACTORY IN THE DESERT

At the Door to the Nest

It was just the same as three years before: the sea in the early March morning boiled in the sunlight beyond the roofs of the barracks and the arches of the factory while the air between the hills and the sea was wine-coloured and had a fiery brilliance. The blue chimneys, the ferro-concrete factory buildings, the workers' houses in the Cosy Colony, and the ribs of the hills with their coating of copper-coloured dust swam in the sunlight and looked as transparent as ice.

Nothing had changed in those three years. The smoky hills with their gullies, landslips, quarries, and cliffs were the same as they had been in his childhood. The familiar workings on the slopes could be seen from a long way off, the shutes running between stones and bushes, bridges and lifts in the narrow crevices. And the factory down below—a whole city of cupolas, towers, and cylindrical roofs—was also unchanged, as was the Cosy Colony on the hillside over the factory with its stunted acacias and the twelve foot square gardens in front of every porch.

If one were to walk through the gap in the concrete wall separating the factory's territory from that of the town outskirts (there had once been a gate but now it was a gap), Gleb's flat would be in the second barrack.

Gleb's wife Dasha and their daughter Nyurka would welcome him. Dasha would give a cry and cling to him, shaken with happiness. Dasha was not expecting him and he did not know what she had gone through without him for three years. There was no road or path in the country which had not had human blood shed on it: had death come this way, passing down the street but missing the workers' hovels, or had it swept away his nest in a whirlwind of fire?

Grubby children played in the empty lot on the other side of the wall and fat-bellied goats with snakelike eyes wandered about, nibbling at the acacia bushes.

The roosters jerked their red heads up in amazement at Gleb and crowed "Cock-a-doodle-doo-is-that?" angrily.

And with his heart Gleb felt how the quarries in the hillside,

the chimneys, and the workers' settlement all emitted a deep underground rumble...

From the hillside he could see how the concrete supports of the cable-way, each shaped like a gigantic letter "H", led down from between the stone factory buildings to the sea, to the piers, in a row of triumphal arches. Steel cables like the strings of a violin were stretched between the supports and from them hung little wagons that had frozen in their flight. Below was the rusty iron muslin of the safety net. And there, right at the end of the pier, above the iron framework of the tower, an electric crane spread its wings.

Good! Back to machines and work. New work, free work, work won in a fiery and bloody struggle. Good!

The goats and the children were making a din. He sniffed at the ammonia smell of rot coming from pigsties. There were tall weeds everywhere and the streets were filthy with chicken droppings.

Why were there goats, pigs, and roosters? The management had previously had a strict rule on that.

Three women with bundles under their arms were approaching him in Indian file along the path from the Cosy Colony. In front was an old woman, a real old witch, while the two behind her were young: one plump and full-breasted while the other had red eyes with red rims and wore her kerchief low over her forehead.

Gleb recognised the old woman as the wife of Loshak the fitter; the full-breasted woman was the wife of another fitter, Gromada; the third woman he did not know.

"Good morning, comrade women!" he saluted them in his joyful excitement.

They looked at him warily and turned off the path to walk past him. Gromada's wife alone snapped back merrily at him.

"So what? Get lost! You can't say hello to everyone..."

"What's the matter with you women? Don't you recognise me or what?"

Loshak's old woman stopped.

"Why, it's Gleb!" she said in a bass voice not to him but to herself. "Good grief! Back from the dead, just like that..."

And set off again, calmly and sullenly.

Gromada's wife gave a laugh and said nothing. Only when she was a long way off, right by the factory wall, did she look round and yell:

“Hurry up, Gleb Ivanich, run! Go and play blind man’s buff with your Dasha... If you can find her, perhaps you’ll marry her again.”

Gleb could not recognise his friendly neighbours. Life must really have been hard on the factory women!

The same fence surrounded the twelve foot square garden and there was the same little cabin of an outdoor lavatory. Only the fence had warped a little—time and the north-east winds of winter—and it was now covered with grey flakes.

Dasha would come running out with a cry at any moment. How would she greet him on his return from fire and death? Perhaps she believed he was dead or perhaps she waited for him, counting every day from that moment late at night when he left her alone with Nyurka in that hovel.

He dumped his bag on the ground and hung his greatcoat on the fence. Then he stood for a minute, jerked his arms up and to the side to calm himself, and wiped the sweat from his face with the sleeve of his army shirt.

Just when he was about to climb onto the porch, the door flew open.

A woman in a red kerchief and a man’s side-fastening Russian blouse, olive-skinned and with heavy eyebrows, stood in the black rectangle of the doorway and stared at him in amazement. When she saw Gleb’s smile, frightened joy flared up in her eyes.

The familiar trembling chin and girlishly full cheeks, the button nose, the turn of her head as she looked carefully at him, and the stubborn eyebrows he remembered—it was her, Dasha. All the rest (what, he could not have said right off) was strange. He had not seen it in her before.

“Dasha, wife! Dearest! Well?..”

He dashed towards her, choking with his tremendous excitement.

Dasha stood frozen on the top step of the porch and only waved Gleb confusedly away as if he were a ghost.

“Is that you?” she whispered ever so quietly and blushed heavily. “Oh, Gleb! My dear!”

But in her eyes, in their black depths, there flashed an unconscious terror.

As soon as Gleb put his arms around her and pressed his lips to hers, she lost all her strength and nearly fainted.

“So there you are... Alive and well, my sweet...”

Dasha was unable to tear herself away from him.

"Oh, Gle-eb!" she kept whispering in a childlike voice, "How did you... I didn't know... Where have you come from? And so ... unexpectedly!"

She laughed and cuddled her head against his chest. Gleb held her tight and felt how her heart was beating, how she was trembling all over and unable to stop.

They tore themselves apart, looked drunkenly into each other's faces and eyes, laughed, and then again hugged each other tightly.

Gleb picked her up in his arms and made as if to carry her into their room, as he had used to in the early days of their marriage. Dasha, however, pulled away.

"Hey, don't get so excited!" she began with a playful smile as she straightened her clothes. "And I'm behaving like a madwoman myself..."

She stepped backwards to the gate, tidying her hair with her comb and breathing heavily. Suddenly she stopped.

"Oh dear, I'm late!" she exclaimed in a frightened voice. "I must run, Gleb, I must run!"

Her tone became serious though her voice still trembled with emotion.

"Go to the factory committee and sign on for your rations. I'm in a terrible rush and can't do it. Oh, Gleb... Oh, comrade! I can hardly believe it... You've changed utterly: a new you, both dear and strange."

"What is all this? Dasha!.. I don't understand..."

Dasha was already standing by the gate and smiling.

"I eat in town, at the people's canteen, and I get my bread from the Party committee. You must go to the factory trade union committee and register for a bread ration card. I won't be back for two days—a very urgent trip to the countryside... You rest after your journey, meanwhile. I've got to go now, there's a cart waiting. I just can't..."

"Wait a minute, Dasha... How can you? I barely show my face and you run off..."

He dived at her and caught her up in his arms. Once again she gently but persistently wriggled free.

"Tell me what all this means, Dasha..."

"I... Well, I work in the women's department, Gleb."

"What do you mean, in the women's department? What about Nyurka? Where's our daughter?"

“Nyrka’s in an orphanage. Go and rest. I haven’t a minute to spare. We’ll talk later... You know: Party discipline.”

And Dasha hurried off. Her red kerchief teased him all the way to the very wall, daring him to follow her and laughing.

There, at the gap in the wall, Dasha looked round, waved to him, and flashed her teeth in a smile.

Gleb ran to the fence.

“Dasha!” he shouted. “What shall I do about Nyrka? She must be quite big now... I’ll go and see her. Where is this orphanage?”

“No, no! Don’t you dare! We’ll go together. Rest for now.”

Gleb stood on the little porch and stared defeatedly at the departing Dasha: he simply could not understand what had happened.

He had spent three years fighting in the Civil War. For those three years he had been utterly caught up in the terrible whirl of events... And how had Dasha spent those years?

So now he had returned to his nest, the nest from which he had disappeared into the lonely night. He was back at the factory where he had come to smell of smoke and oil as a young lad. But his nest was empty and Dasha had not welcomed him as he had dreamed she would.

He sat down on the porch steps and suddenly felt very tired. Not because he had walked the three miles from the station but because of his three years away and Dasha’s strange reception.

Why was it so unusually quiet? Why was the air trilling? Why could he hear the cackling of chickens all over the Cosy Colony?

Those weren’t buildings but melting icebergs while the chimneys were blue glass cylinders. Their tops were free from soot: the mountain winds had blown it off and the lightning conductor on one of the chimneys had been uprooted. By a storm? Or by human hands?

It had never used to smell of dung in the settlement. But now, mixed with the smell of the weeds spreading down from the hill, there was the pungent and rotten odour of animal stalls.

There, that building at the foot of the hill, that was the metal workshop. Its immense windows used at that time of day to reflect the sunlight in blinding shards but now there was only the black emptiness of broken panes.

And the town on the hill across the bay was also different: it had grown greyer, become covered with mould and dust, settled down on the slope. It wasn't a town but an abandoned quarry.

And there was the door left open by Dasha and beyond it their empty room... Below, in the valley, stood the cold and forgotten factory....

A rooster strutted up to the fence, raised its head, and looked evilly and morosely at Gleb with a single eye.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo-is-that?"

Machines

There were two ways to go from the Cosy Colony to the factory trade union committee: by the road running the length of the factory buildings or by paths winding through the broken ground at the foot of the hill, through bushes, rubble, and the open spaces of former workings.

From there he could see the complex conglomeration of buildings that made up the factory: towers, arcs, viaducts, ferro-concrete and stone buildings, some light as air, like giant bubbles, and others cubically severe in their simplicity and architectural ponderousness. They were either piled on top of one another, welded to each other, or grew to various heights on their own, monoliths on the hillside. Lonely little huts were to be seen unexpectedly rising from the blue limestone; they were scattered about the gullies in the hillside, on old shutes strewn with stones, amidst abandoned wagons and the dusty grey bushes, under cliffs and on the clifftops, on piles of rubble. The quarries stepped in iridescent terraces down into the gullies and were swallowed by luxuriant young trees. The sea beyond the factory swam from cape to cape with mirages. Two piers with lighthouses at their ends stretched like bow-strings out into the bay, one from the far side of the bay, where the town stood, and the other from the factory. One could see how the swell ran in uncompassable semicircles towards the factory and the moorings and how they broke into snowy surf on the shore.

It was the same sight as three years earlier. But then both the factory and the hills had been shaken by an internal fire. Then the rumbling of unseen machinery and the whine of electricity had made living things of the factory's buildings,

chimneys, and piers, had filled everything with volcanic tension.

Gleb walked along the path, looking down at the factory, listening to the silence coming from below, a silence broken only by the tinkling of the brooks, and felt that he, too, had grown heavy, was covered with stony grey dust.

Was this the factory which he remembered from his childhood, where he was used to going to and fro, using all its paths and roadways? And was he—Gleb Chumalov, a blue-collar worker from the metal workshop—really walking down an overgrown path with a morose question in his mind and amazement in his eyes?

Once he had worn curling mustachios and soot and metal dust had always darkened his face (making him look tanned), but now he was clean-shaven, the skin of his wind-burnt nose and cheekbones peeling. He no longer smelt of smoke and oil and his back was no longer bent from his work. He was now a Red Armyman in a green printed cap with a crimson star on it and the Order of the Red Banner on his chest.

He walked on, looking at the factory, the workings on the hillside, and the chimneys. Then he stopped.

“What they’ve done to it, the swine!” he thought angrily. “It’s not enough to shoot such bastards... This isn’t a factory but a coffin...”

He went down to the factory, stepping into a yard black with coal dust on which grass was spreading like mould. High pyramids of anthracite had once stood there, the coal crystals flashing like tarry diamonds. A cliff of yellow and brown strata hung over one side of the yard. This was now crumbling and the piles of rubble were swallowing up what was left of the work done by men. A semicircle of branching rails ran around the yard. On the other side of the low wall the blue obelisk of a chimney rose from its pit a hundred metres into the air; the immense electromechanical block lay flattened out below it.

The factory looked like a dead world. The north-east winds had nibbled at the icy window panes, mountain torrents had laid bare the iron ribs of the concrete blocks, and the piles of cement dust on all the ledges had turned back into stone.

Klyopka the watchman walked by. He was wearing a sackcloth, beltless blouse that reached down to his knees and worn-out shoes on his bare feet. These looked

like they were made of cement, as did his feet.

"Hey, you... You old wreck! What are you wandering about here like a zombie for? You've watched it to a cemetery, you old devil?!"

"Strictly no entry to unauthorised persons!" Klyopka stated in unmoved tones from force of habit.

"Raving, are you? I suppose you've lost all your keys in this pile of rubble!"

"Keys aren't any use. All the locks have seized up... Go walk with the wind! Goats in the factory... And rats... But no people... They've gone."

"You're an old rat yourself. You've all scuttled into your holes like crayfish or are walking around doing nothing..."

Klyopka rested a surly eye on Gleb.

"Pointed cap... Devil's horn... There's no one to butt here..." he said, masticating with his toothless jaws.

And walked on, shuffling his feet.

A high viaduct on stone pillars ran from the yard to the factory's main building. Holes for machine gun emplacements had been made in the concrete walls. The factory had been a White Guard stronghold. They had made stables and POW barracks of the factory buildings. The barracks had been nightmarish prisons during the intervention.

Inside there was nothing but cobwebs covered with cement dust. Old dust and a mouldy stench floated down from the high ceilings barely visible in the half-light. There was the gigantic mass of a chimney with a torn-out damper. Air roared like a waterfall in the dust-swept funnel, whirled about in it, sucked up by the howling orifice. An iron damper had once stopped up that terrible maw and the pipe had roared away, sucking in the fiery cinders from the cylinders of the revolving ovens. Once these had glinted in the flames as their heated monstrous bodies shifted and people had scurried about beneath them like ants. Everywhere fat pipes had wound about like iron arcs and cactuses.

"Ah, the bastards! What they've done to it... What they've done to it, the scum!"

Gleb walked down the length of several tunnels to the engine room. There, in a room painted sky-blue, was the severe temple of machinery. The floor was laid with coloured tiles in a checkered pattern. The diesels stood there like black idols decorated with gold and silver. They stood solidly and

neatly in long rows cut into blocks and seemed absolutely ready to work: kick the starter and they would throb, their bright metal parts glinting. The air seemed to flow in hot waves to meet Gleb. The flywheels were still but looked like they were spinning. Here everything was the same as before—smart and clean—and every part of the engines breathed the warmth of human care. The tile floor was as ever waxed and shiny and there was no dust in the windows: the panes (there were plenty of them) vibrated, dispersing blue and amber shards of light. Here man had lived stubbornly on and the engines were alive and tense with expectation because of him.

The man in question, in blue overalls and with a cap on his head, came running out from a lane between the diesels, wiping his hands on some oakum, the whites of his eyes and his white teeth flashing. He was tense, on his guard, and careful.

“Hey, friend! You? Just look at you—a brave army commander! This is grand! What a pleasure it is to see you!”

He was born there (his father had also been a mechanic) and had grown up surrounded by machines. His world did not extend beyond the confines of the engine room. Brynza and Gleb had grown up together and had together gone to work in the factory.

“So here’s our warrior! Come on, come on, let’s have a look at you... Pointed cap on his head and all that’s changed is that his nose is longer and there’s a star...”

Gleb embraced his old friend.

“Brynza! Friend! Still here? Ah, damn it! From the look of things round here, one would think all your engines were in working order.”

Brynza took Gleb by the arm and dragged him down one of the passages between the diesels.

“Look, friend, at the she-devils... I keep them as spotlessly clean as young girls. All I need is for someone to shout ‘Brynza, start ’em up!’ and all this lovely machinery will start turning over and drumming out the iron march... Machinery needs just as much discipline as your army.”

“What about the goats, Brynza? And aren’t you worried about people sawing off metal to make lighters?”

“Ha, the goatherds know me....” Brynza snorted with merry malice. “If any lighter-makers came in here, I’d show

them what for... Thieves, bastards! It's for them I keep that rifle... See?" He waved the hand holding the oakum at the rifle in the corner. "As if against bandits... Tin and copper hunters..."

Gleb stroked the shiny parts of the machinery glancing at Brynza with surprise and hope.

"You've got everything so beautifully organised, friend, that I don't want to leave! The factory's in such a mess... The people too! What the hell are you doing here if the factory's an empty barn and the workers have turned into tramps and self-seekers?"

Brynza looked glum. It seemed to Gleb that his silence was hostile but then he excitedly took a few paces up and down by one of the diesels and spoke.

"The factory must be started up again, Gleb. The factory can't die... Otherwise why did we make the revolution? Why do we exist? Why do you have that medal?"

Then suddenly he was mournful and quiet again.

"You don't know," he said plaintively, "how machines live... You don't know... You could go mad if you did and if you felt..."

When the diesels had fallen silent and the people had left the factory for the revolution, the Civil War, the famine, and the suffering, Brynza had stayed behind in the silence of the workshops. He lived like the machinery and was as lonely as those severe and shining machines. He had remained true to them to the end.

"The factory must be started, Gleb. If you have machines, my friend, they cannot stand idle: they work even when they are standing still... Ah, if only you could understand that! But whether you feel it or not, you must do everything in your power to strike the first match... And you can always rely on me."

Gleb looked at the diesels' polished bodies and at Brynza, cocked his ear to the hollow silence of the walls and the emptiness of the yards, and felt helpless, felt that he had no words for his friend: he felt lost himself and this graveyard frightened him. He was a stranger and everything looked unfamiliar and terrible to him, like the site of a past rout. What could he say to Brynza now? He, Gleb, did not have even a warm nook of his own, even his wife had left him at the moment one forgets everything and wants nothing except

the person one loves... Couldn't she have put off her trip for his sake?

The Same Old Crowd

Workers were crowded in the narrow, dark little corridor of the factory management's basement offices. In the dirty tobacco smoke the equally dirty people grey with the dust of the quarries and roads all looked the same, like evening shadows.

They swore and yelled about rations, the disgusting food in the canteen, the paraffin, the houses, the lighters, and the goats.

The door to the factory committee was open and inside there was just as much tobacco smoke and the same shoving crowd. No one recognised Gleb as he pushed his way through the throng; all he got was glares at his cap with its star and his Order of the Red Banner before being instantly forgotten.

A young man in a white lace bonnet and wearing a corset over his jacket and a moustache press on his clean-shaven lip was dancing in the doorway. He was being pressed by the crowd but worked with his elbows to make room for himself, affecting a woman's voice and clowning.

"Please allow me to introduce myself... Pear de trooz, monsirs!

*"Oh my apple, little apple, wherever you may roll
You'll always find committee rooms are a stinking hole..."*

People enjoyed the spectacle, laughing, and encouraging him.

A tanned little man racked by consumptive coughs rebuked the lad: this was Gromada the fitter. Gleb was astonished at what three years had been able to do to the man.

"Stop your rowing, Mitrei! You should know better and ought to be ashamed and so on..."

"Oh, comrade factory committee, I beg your pardon, please forgive me, wrap your nerves up in a bundle and pin them to your belly-button... I'm dead and done for! Touched and shaken! Grab my corset from the floor, take my trousers from the door, tidy my whiskers and sing some more: I'll be there at your bloody demo... Whew!"

And clowning, and working with his elbows, he pranced to the exit followed by a string of curious onlookers.

Gleb walked into the room and stood near the wall, behind some workers. Loshak the hunchback fitter, as dark as ever and looking still more like the metal he worked, was sitting at the desk. He was well ensconced in his chair and looked as indifferent as a deaf man.

"Damn you good-for-nothings lording it over us!" a woman shouted hoarsely. "Look at the way you've fed your faces! And while my useless old man sits at home scratching the goat, I've got to come and waste my time with you fat-arsed bastards..."

The workers pushed her from behind and choked with laughter.

"Give them what for, Auntie Avdotya! Give them a taste of your tongue!"

"Shut up, you rabble! What have we got these factory committee people over us for? Now tell me something: are these shoes or what?"

At this, she swung one leg up and brought her foot crashing down on the desk. Her skirt was rucked up baring her blue-veined leg to above the knee.

Loshak sat on as unmoved as a deaf man. Gromada, however, jumped up, choking with rage.

"Citizeness! Comrade! You're a working woman... The factory committee is carrying out the task ... and so on... Don't you understand..."

"Come on, Auntie Avdotya! Answer for all of us!"

"Quiet, studs! Where are the boots you gave me as part of my rations? How long did they last? I walked to the village ... and three times to the canteen for that swill to feed the pigs ... and look what's happened to the soles..."

She wrenched the boot off her foot and flung it down on the desk. It bounced and ended up with its open maw against Loshak's chest.

He calmly picked up the boot and examined it from every angle.

"Well, woman, get on with your business. We're listening."

Gromada lost his patience, jumped up again, and waved his arms.

"I can't tolerate, Comrade Loshak ... how this citizeness is thinking irresponsibly and so on... She should know better and ought to be ashamed."

"Wait, Gromada! A good steam-bath is useful... Let me

have a little talk with her. So get on with your complaint, woman, and tell us what work you did to be given these boots."

"You won't get round me like that, you hunchbacked hooligan... Whether I worked or not, I want to be paid better than..."

"And I'm asking you: for what duties do you want to be paid rivers of milk and honey? Well? Let's have the other boot! These were given to you by mistake... We're going to requisition your pigs for the canteen swill, which you should eat yourself if you're hungry..."

Avdotya pushed back against the workers, rocking the whole crowd, right down to the back rows.

"Ha, damn you! Watch out, brothers, he'll rook you all!"

Gloomy and calm as ever, Loshak picked up the boot and held it up in the air.

"Here, take this, woman! Tell your husband to mend them and then wear them. And if you want a laugh come again when the time's more suitable."

Avdotya took the boot, sat down on the floor, and began hurriedly tugging it onto her thick leg. Everyone laughed.

Loshak gave a grunt, placed his hands on the desk, and pushed himself up. He stared at the crowd with heavy eyes for a long time and then grunted again.

"Listen friends: listen to how things are done under Soviet power... It took the peasants' grain to make war against the bourgeois, from the bourgeois it took their factories, like ours here... But there's no work. It took all sorts of junk off the bourgeois and says: take what's yours, workers' commune, and see to it that all is put to good use. Do what you want with it... What I mean is: let's get the factory going and things will be different."

And he sat down again, still as sullen and heavy.

Gleb pushed his way through to the desk and saluted the factory committee.

"Hello, comrades! Here I am... I've come back to my lathe."

Gromada gasped, waved his arms, and threw himself at Gleb.

"Loshak, old man, don't you see? It's Gleb Chumalov... Our Gleb! He was dead but now he's alive again... Look, Loshak!"

Loshak glanced at Gleb as indifferently as at the other workers who crowded into the factory committee every day from morning until evening.

"I see him. Not that he'll be much help. The metal workshop's in a mess, Gleb: they're making lighters there... Damn place!"

With an effort he brought his long and heavy arm up from beneath the table and slowly stretched it out to Gleb.

The men from various workshops surged closer to look at Gleb. They goggled at him as if he had risen from the dead and exchanged puzzled glances. Mumbling, and all reaching out at once, they caught hold of both his hands.

"Well, Comrade Chumalov... You'll be wanting to take a good look around... So we've taken it over... And where has it got us? We've driven out all the old bosses... Everything's gone to pieces. Some are pinching rivets, others stripping the brass off the machinery, others chopping up the drive belts... Workers' control, indeed!"

Gleb looked at the people around him and nodded happily.

"Aha, coopers ... blacksmiths ... electricians ... fitters ... The same old crowd!"

Gromada pushed through the crowd with a chair in his hands and obligingly set it down near Gleb.

"Stand back, comrades! Make room for Comrade Chumalov! After all, he's our warrior back from the Red Army... And since he's a worker from our wonderful factory, we must be proud of him. Had Comrade Chumalov not truly suffered ... and broken through the Greens to join the Red Army, and so on, a lot of you maybe would not have taken the step of joining the ranks of the RCP... So, comrades, that's what Comrade Chumalov means to us..."

There were more voices from the group of workers.

"So you made it, brother?.."

"Good for you!"

"Have fun now you're home."

"Not much fun to be had here, things being what they are."

But Gromada was already waving his bony fists at them and shouting in his shallow voice.

"Comrades, we the working class are all struggling to take possession of production and it's a crying shame, comrades, to give way to panic... We won battles at the fronts and

liquidated everything, so haven't we the strength for economic work?"

Gleb said nothing, looking at the typhus-ravaged faces of the workers, at the sickly Gromada (a small man with a big name and big words in his mouth), at the hunchbacked Loshak, and again was pained at having failed to find the warmth and heartfelt joy of which he had dreamed all the way home. They were all apparently stunned by his arrival but there was coldness and alienation behind their smiles and exclamations. The people seemed all burnt out, totally paralysed. Even Gromada's outbursts were so forced as to be ridiculous, as if he were trying to wax more enthusiastic than necessary. These people, Brynza, and even Dasha all had something in common. But perhaps it was he that was out of sorts as a result of his strange meeting with her?

"Yes, friends... It's not a factory you have here but a rubbish dump. What have you been up to, brothers? We have been fighting a war and what deeds have you been doing? Couldn't you think of anything better to do than to raise goats and make lighters?"

Someone in the crowd laughed hoarsely.

"If we'd counted on the bloody factory, we'd have died off like flies... What goat is it, the blasted factory?"

The laughter and those simple words hit Gleb where it hurt: they expressed the plain truth that can crush any dreamer. Was that why Gromada's enthusiasm seemed pathetic and misplaced amidst these hungry and coarse people? But their spiteful laughter and contempt for their factory, for themselves, and for their workers' duty infuriated Gleb. Blood rushed to his face but he restrained himself and looked the workers over.

"Well, you should have died off then! You ought to have died off but kept the factory in order... Are you thugs to rob your own pockets?"

"Ha, you're not the only one to come preach your preachings at us!"

Loshak carelessly swatted at a fly which was trying to land on his forehead.

"You've come to the factory," he said in his bass voice, "and that's good, Chumalov. We'll find work for you too. We're going to get things going."

Gromada was staring at Gleb with burning eyes and

evidently bursting to make some big speech. But it was more than he could do.

Gleb took the cap off his head, put it down on the table, and smiled in an embarrassed way. His eyes, however, were angry and worried.

"So I came home and got no welcome from my wife. I don't even recognise my own wife now. Everything's all gone to hell. All right, register me, Loshak, for a ration card ... for the canteen and for bread..."

The workers stirred and cheered up.

"Now look at him! The preacher preached and now he wants to fill his belly."

"That we understand..."

"That's what you should have started with..."

"If you've come to us, brother, then live like we do..."

"Everyone wants a full belly..."

Gromada began heatedly arguing with the workers.

"Comrades, you know that Chumalov is a fellow worker of ours, one of us, just like... After all, he suffered on the battlefield and so on..."

"That's what we were saying!"

"Everyone wants a full belly..."

Gleb stood up and calmly let his eye run over the whole dusty crowd. His nearly wooden calm radiated a mixture of despair and menace.

"Comrades! What are you trying to prove to me? Bellies are beside the point in this. One's belly is one's belly and there's no getting away from it... What you need is a head on your shoulders... And you've lost your heads so that you've stopped being workers and become a mob of self-seekers. You won't beat me that easily. Go on, shout about my belly as much as you like—I don't mind: I haven't eaten you out of house and home yet... But I am ashamed to see you so demoralised. That is worse than treachery. You've gone out of your minds, comrades. Well, here I am... Where have I come? I've come home. Do you think I'm going to twiddle my thumbs, like you? No way. I'm going to fight, to the last ounce of my strength. You thought I'd been killed? No. I fought and I'm going to fight... The Party and the army ordered me to go to my factory and fight for socialism. Like I did at the front..."

The workers looked embarrassed and shuffled their feet.

“Get things going, Gleb. That’s what I say... Right! I’ll stick it out with you... Right!”

Gromada laughed, dashed about by the desk, and burned with fever.

...A round-shouldered and noble-looking old man with a silver beard walked past the window down the concrete path, supporting himself on his walking stick. It was Kleist, the engineer... Like then, in the days of the White Guard rule, the man was again crossing his path. It would be a good thing to run out of the factory committee’s offices and meet him face to face... He’d probably die of fright...

1925

Translated by David Sinclair-Loutit

M. Prishvin

(b. 1873, Khrushchevo Estate, near Orel—d. 1954, Moscow)

Mikhail Prishvin spoke about caring for nature, about how our love for “our lesser brothers—the animals” should become an irresistible, heartfelt need, about nature being not our enemy but an ally—at a time when there was no sign or even hint of the ecological crisis to come. Such foresight testifies to the profound wisdom of a man able in good time to delve into matters that will be of vital importance to mankind.

Mikhail Prishvin’s amazingly harmonious character and views were visible even in the future writer’s youth. He was expelled from his gymnasium for “free-thinking”. He was arrested for joining Marxist circles while he was a student at the Riga Polytechnical College. He completed his education at Leipzig University, where he studied in the agronomical department of the faculty of philosophy. Prishvin’s free-thinking led him to take an interest in ethnography. The learned agronomist set out to wander about the

Russian North and Norway. His book *IN THE LAND OF UNFRIGHTENED BIRDS* appeared in 1907, followed in 1908 by *FOR THE MAGIC LOAF*.

After this, books by Prishvin in which he manifests himself both as a poet and scientist appeared in quick succession.

Right up to the end of his life, Mikhail Prishvin worked on his autobiographical novel *KASHCHEI'S CHAIN*. Prishvin's poetic style at times becomes highly symbolic—mythological situations of a sweeping character emerge from behind his work's concrete images.

GINSENG (1933) is one of Prishvin's best works and is written in just such a profoundly symbolic style. The lyrical hero's search for the "root of life" is a sort of symbol of the search for creative powers, the power of feeling, of love. The real and the invented, truth and fairytale, the concrete and the mythical are all organically blended in this tale, are worked into an amazingly poetic alloy. Man appears in this and other works of Prishvin's not as a force standing over nature but as one of the best and most perfect of nature's creations—with the one reservation, it is true, that he should not pervert himself or warp the moral essence of what it is to be human.

Mikhail Prishvin was a prolific writer. Quite a number of years have passed since his death but the philosophic and poetic wisdom of Prishvin's writings grow more evident with time.

Ginseng

(An excerpt)

I invented a sure remedy to cure foul moods and remove distress over bad luck—to rise before dawn, leave the hut and, leaning against something firm, to concentrate on the thought that my root of life was growing, that it needed time to do so and because of that I should not bend before any misfortune but always meet it as unavoidable. I thought about time, about how, sooner or later, my search would be crowned with success. It seemed to me that in this daily exercise I was developing my willpower and forever arming myself against shameful weakness in the face of misfortune. But at the first serious clash with life, my well thought-out but untried method let me down and I was so stricken that I forgot entirely about the Ginseng.

I am sitting with Laiba on the ruins of my nursery for spotted deer, playing from time to time on my deer horn. It occurred to me that were I the slightest bit superstitious, inclined to attach supernatural causes to the simple and comprehensible but unpleasant, I would undoubtedly think that Hua-lu was a witch who had cast a spell on me with her beauty: she had before my eyes turned into a beautiful woman and, once I had fallen in love with her, promptly disappeared. However, when I at long last managed to make do again, having broken out of the charmed circle by my male creative force, the same Hua-lu suddenly shattered all this. Finally some striped devil—Chipmunk—appeared. Thus since the beginning of time man has been gradually wrapping himself in superstition's protective clothing: witches and devils inhabit objects and circumstances and only children, only children remain alive....

A lot of similar thoughts passed through my saddened head at the ebb of the vital wave. The next wave was round the corner. Laiba had for a while now been looking in a strange way behind me and then at me, as if some common event that was nothing to worry about but still something was taking place behind me. For some reason I attached no significance to the dog's silent signs and continued with my melancholy thoughts until I heard a clear rustling sound right behind my back. I immediately looked round and ... there, right behind

me, were Hua-lu and Mishutka, eating the soy-beans scattered on the ground during the fight. What a joy that was! But that was not all! Chipmunk, not alone but with five other striped devils, large and small, was also there and they too were busy with the soy-beans. It has been like this with me many times in my life: just when one is beginning to have recourse to *recherché* explanations, to mysterious and distant forces to understand and ease misfortune, life suddenly opens herself to one, as to her favourite, and presents herself in such clear order that one is left chortling and shouting madly, honey on one's lips and tail a-wagging. I will never forget that moment when the sun came of the fog and the dewy cobweb shone all over with diamonds and pearls; how many colours there were—and such colours! There an azalea flowered amidst the pearl necklaces, there lilies flowered amidst the diamond tiaras, there a spider had caught a delicate edelweiss in his silver thread and drawn it, too, into his construction of morning joy. Such a wealth of precious stones can be found only in Arabian tales but even their astounding Arabian fantasy could not create so rich and so happy a Caliph as I.

What depths of originality, what inexhaustible funds of creativity there are in man, yet how many unhappy people come and go without ever understanding their Ginseng, without ever having been able to discover in their heart of hearts the source of strength, courage, joy, and happiness! Look at all the deer I had, and how wonderful, too! I needed only to remember how Grey Eyes had behaved under the knife! But did I ever take such delight in all of them together as I did when Hua-lu arrived alone? One might think that I understood at the time how, with Hua-lu's help, I would be able to recapture a large number of deer and that was why I was so pleased. Not at all! I was happy because being separated from the deer had disclosed to me how much effort I had invested in this matter, I was pleased because I would now be able to begin my unusually wonderful construction again. So Luven and I happily set to righting the fence, strengthening it in such a way that the reindeer would be quite unable to jump it or push it over, even in a concerted action. It was now little by little becoming clear to me why Hua-lu's return from the taiga at the call of the deer horn meant far more for my work than simply being able to recapture all the stags who had disappeared. I now without the slightest risk

carried out daily experiments: in the morning I would let Hua-lu out to pasture freely and in the evening call her back with the deer horn. Furthermore, because each time I called her, I gave her and Mishutka some specially prepared treat, I got it to the point that she would come tearing back across the knolls to the nursery at whatever time of day I chose to play the horn.

Thus little by little did the time for the autumn mating season approach again and one day it simply dawned upon me what I should do to get my deer back and acquire more besides. Once, a herd of young does neared the knoll opposite the Eagle's Nest, accompanied, for some reason, by Old Antlers, a stag with very large antlers. It was early autumn, and even that wapiti was not yet roaring, but, just as in humans, there are, of course, mischievous animals. In all likelihood, the deer I had fed well for my experiment became mischievous ahead of time and perhaps even made unsuccessful advances towards some does who were still far too young. Observing Old Antlers from concealment, I waited for a moment when he was behind a knoll in order to quietly open the gate to the nursery, letting Hua-lu out for a walk and setting a trap for him. Hua-lu ran merrily up to the herd but was immediately noticed by Old Antlers who ran up to her and greeted her. Perhaps they were already friends of a sort due to the deer's unusual life in the nursery. Hua-lu, however, only allowed herself to be sniffed so much and no more: as soon as the fattened stag went beyond the bounds, she left him and mixed with the herd of does. About an hour passed and Hua-lu forgot about Old Antlers. She came out of the herd. She had not gone far, though, when he again came up and made advances to her. There was nothing else she could do but run back to the herd again, but I considered this to be the best moment for my purposes and, from where I was lying out of sight and smell behind a stone with the end of the rope attached to the gate held firmly in my hand, I tooted on the deer horn. Hua-lu instantly bounded off homewards and I saw that I had not miscalculated: Old Antlers also set off at top speed after her. He not only did not have the slightest feeling of doubt as he ran in through the gate but did not even turn round when it closed after him or show the slightest concern when I appeared.

I began to wait impatiently for the time when the spotted

deer would be on heat. The vine leaves gradually went brown, the small-leafed maple caught fire, and one day, after an unimportant little typhoon, a frost was born in the silence of the starry night and on that same September night, just like last year, the first wapiti roared again from the same place on the same hill.

Another two weeks of changes that were each in turn caught by the eye went past. The grapes ripened. Dead azaleas turned into red shining saucers as they lay flat in the yellow grass and the whole pasture looked like a battlefield spotted with the blood of deer. Then, at night once again, the first stag roared from the place where the black crest is cut by the tail of the Great Bear. Another voice, like an echo, answered him and was in turn answered by a distant echo. What I most cared about now that the roaring had begun was not to miss the day when Hua-lu like all other does would leave in her tracks the smell that excites the stags so terribly: picking it from afar up in the wind or just on the ground in front of them, they stop eating and set off in search of the doe, roaring as they go. Once they have found this smell, stags are prepared to go into mortal battle over a doe although the doe herself wants on a day like that to play and nothing more: an agile doe will be first to play with an inexperienced or stupid stag and when he, heated, rushes at her, she will run off at top speed, as if assuring him that this marital race is all that is best and the only valuable thing about her. Thanks to having caught Old Antlers again, I was able to find out precisely the day on which Hua-lu was in the right condition to tease and run, and yet to evade any dirty, lust-filled stags.

At last there came the evening when I saw the first signs of this. I put a halter on Hua-lu and very slowly led her along the path around Misty Hill. There was a moon that night and stags were roaring all around and I sometimes even caught the dry cracking sound of bony antlers striking each other. Deer are for some reason less nervous on moonlight nights and I frequently saw either antlers or patches of white fur not far from me. Stags would sometimes roar so close to me that it was already no longer a roar as the noise sounds from a distance but a mixture of very different sounds, although they all spoke, like the distant roar, of suffering: an agonising snort, groan and cry. Together with my Hua-lu, I felt inside me a sort of hollow dislike for the stags' cry of passion (at

close quarters it is really quite disgusting), but amidst all the coarse sounds there is one note of naive and almost childish hurt and gently submissive pleading for sympathy. In my human way, I imagined that Hua-lu too only heeded the roars because of this plea for sympathy at their suffering and that it was because of this that she was now ready to play and run with any stag. She kept stopping, pricking up her ears, trembling occasionally, and, of course, leaving the mark of her passage everywhere. The soft gentle wind caressed the Misty Hill and the moment the stag smelt Hua-lu he stopped roaring and walked into the wind, after the smell. However, right by the smell of what he desired, he found the smell of the most terrible animal there is and he stopped in bewilderment so total that he even forgot to roar. Yes, they have a sense which man has now quite lost. I guess from that lone pathetic note that, as with us and our appreciation of flowers, they sense and therefore strive after the beautiful, independent of their passion at least for a moment, and when later the passion becomes too great, making beauty alone insufficient, then we make music, and they roar....

So in all likelihood quite a number of stags smelt Hua-lu as they sniffed the wind wafting over Misty Hill and walked into it until, meeting also the terrible odour of man, they stopped, unsure of themselves, stood for a long time on one spot, and only then advanced cautiously, following the smell and spoor.

The frost was born at dawn. I led Hua-lu into the nursery, set the gate-trap, and, protected from the wind by a stone, began waiting for events to develop on the knolls forming a chain all the way to Misty Hill. The air had just a touch of frost in it and was completely transparent while Misty Hill was surrounded by a quite blue sea. The mountain rushes were clothed in the white lace of frost and against the blue background the whole sight grew more and more beautiful. Little by little as it grew lighter, it became so beautiful that deep inside me I began to feel an acute pain, such a pain that had it grown just a touch worse I would, like a deer, have raised my head and roared. Why, if everything all around one is beautiful, does one feel something like a mortal pain? Or is it perhaps that I, like a deer, expect something pleasant when I see beauty and, not getting it, suffer, and therefore also want to roar like one?

When everything was to be seen clearly and everything was shining, I caught sight of stags here and there on the deer paths winding down from Misty Hill, at first tiny as flies in the distance and later larger, though they from time to time disappeared entirely in the ravines between the knolls, before appearing from behind first one then another hillock. When at last the stag neared the top of the last knoll, it seemed as if his antlers were rising up from it, as if they were growing out of the earth. On the knoll opposite the Eagle's Nest there stood a lonely Italian pine. Toughened by its constant struggling against typhoons, it was all knotted, and each knot—the mark of a typhoon—held out one victorious branch with long dark-green needles. The trunk itself was all twisted and yet it was a tall, victorious trunk and its shadow stretched over the yellow field with the blood-red patches of dead azaleas all the way to a hollow with thick green grass and young oak trees growing in it. This hollow was like a small ravine: it got deeper and deeper, as it went all the way to the sea, and, at the bottom of it, amidst the stones, sometimes showing itself and sometimes disappearing, ran a little brook. It was in that hollow that a herd of does was grazing. There were two stags with them, very dark and calm animals; they did not court the does, did not eat, and did not roar but simply stood still like some watching monks. An unusually large stag came out from behind a knoll and moved towards the Italian pine casting the shadow. He walked with an extraordinarily grand tread and at the same time had no antlers. This stag with the lordly bearing of a master of many does but at the same time with only small bony lumps on his head instead of antlers left a strange impression on one. Grey Eyes, of course, had also followed the track I had laid from the hill and was now looking down from the hillock right at us through the open gate. I decided to capture him as I had Old Antlers and quietly opened the gate, set the rope, stroked Hua-lu in a parting gesture, and let her go. She set off merrily and quietly, heading slowly for the herd in the hollow. Grey Eyes, however, understood that he would not be able to extract her easily from the herd and set off on straight legs to cut her off. He managed to do this and stopped her. It was not so long before that this stag had been very beautiful but now he was quite filthy. The muscles of his stomach and of his immense neck, swollen from so much roaring, twitched

convulsively. His eyes were bloodshot. Hua-lu darted to one side to escape this terrible monster, made for the tree, and he set off after her. They both disappeared behind the knoll. I then picked up my horn and tooted on it. Hua-lu evidently heard me because she changed course and headed for the entrance to the hollow where the herd of does was grazing watched over by the two immobile black monks. Had the bushes in the hollow not slowed her down, she would have run to me, without a doubt bringing the stag after her. The bushes, however, did delay her and Grey Eyes instantly caught up with her.

...Did he at that moment, like us humans, have some peculiar, deer's picture of beauty created for him by his sense of smell? No, I think that at that point no trace of that pictured beauty could have remained, that all he saw before him was not beauty but an imagined pleasant life. He reared up. And suddenly, while he was in the air, there was nothing below him. It happens sometimes: one thinks that there one is about to achieve one's aim, and then suddenly there's nothing! Hua-lu resorted to the only way of saving herself that she had: she lay down on the ground. Grey Eyes, seeing that there was nothing for him after all, tossed his head back and gave a high whistle. This high-pitched whistle, like a reverse siren, changed into a roar as its note became lower and lower and then rose up into a whistle again. This the stag repeated time and again. In the interval between the whistle and the roar he produced, like all stags, a note of either complaint or injury, the note that is the key to understanding the origins of deer music. And I also thought to myself: yes, of course, my mortal pain was due to my having once, like the stag, failed to distinguish between beauty and the good life, and when the good life suddenly vanished the sense of beauty aroused mortal pain in me.

If I were to observe deer as a scientist and do all the orthodox studies, I would have to start by refusing to attribute my own thoughts and feelings to them. But I myself suffered inordinately out there in the desert, like any animal, and because of that felt a kinship with them, was sorry for them: Hua-lu lay there, waiting, and Grey Eyes stood over her, painfully humbled, thin, splattered with mud, filthy, but nevertheless a lord of the taiga with bony lumps instead of majestic antlers. It was so clear, so easy to understand, that

the only way to preserve oneself was to fight! Now all the questions were reduced to a single one: either you or me, either I'll kill you or die myself....

The whole herd of does came out of the hollow and surrounded their sister Hua-lu, as if they understood and sympathised with her. The lord of the harem, Grey Eyes, stood waiting for the good life to come, looking for someone to fight that instant. Both the monks, one with six tines to his antlers and the other with four, stood transfixed and dared not take so much as a step. Or did they understand that antlers were not everything? Or had they still not recovered from the shock of seeing their liege hornless? Or had they already caught sight of Black Back, Sharp Horns, Dandy and a lot of other stags, tried and tested in previous fights, coming down the deer paths from the hill? Black Back stood for some reason on the hillock by the tree and did not want to go any closer: as always, there was something mysterious about him, an air of having a devilish plan. Eight stags, who were completely unknown to me, were now disposed about the meadow between the knoll where Black Back stood and the hollow where Grey Eyes was poised menacingly at the ready. Perhaps Black Back's plan was to set all eight stags to fighting Grey Eyes one after the other and, only if Grey Eyes beat each of these in turn, to fall himself upon the tired beast or simply finish him off?

Grey Eyes began by crinkling his nose and snorting contemptuously in the direction of the stag nearest him in the field. That's often enough to make an opponent run. The stag, however, paid no attention to the hornless stag's warning. Grey Eyes stuck his tongue out to one side. The other stag stood his ground and even cheekily crinkled his own nose. The lord of the taiga then began to advance jerkily but the stranger did not run off. On the contrary, he lowered his antlers and actually advanced a few steps, too. He was probably still young and audacious and did not know what it was to be butted by Grey Eyes. And in fact a single blow from the bony lumps on Grey Eyes' forehead knocked his forelegs out from under him whereupon Grey Eyes, like all fighting stags in such situations, butted him in the side near his heart so hard that he broke the stag's ribs, with splinters from the ribs driving into a mortally dangerous spot under the left shoulder blade. The brave young stag was already unable

to rise. Grey Eyes then wrinkled his nose at the second stag but this one ran away. Sticking his tongue out, Grey Eyes charged the third who also ran away, followed by all the other stags except for Black Back. When Grey Eyes crinkled his nose at Black Back, the latter crinkled his nose in reply and charged.

Not far from the only tree on the knoll, there used to stand a second one of which there now remained only a stump. The enemies met at this stump, each, perhaps, intending to use it to support their front legs. They both set their forelegs on the stump, butting each other and trying to make the other back down. They circled the stump for a very long time and after a while one could actually see that their hooves had dug a deep trench around it. Suddenly a last shove tore the stump free from beneath their hooves and it flew far to one side. The two fighters then fell upon each other. At that moment Hua-lu suddenly ran out from behind a bush, escaping from Dandy, and began running. I gave a signal with my horn. Hua-lu bent her steps straight towards me, followed by Dandy. The fighters also noticed Dandy and went after him, followed by all the stags and the whole herd. They thronged right past me. When they had penetrated a long way out onto the promontory, I not only closed the gates but carefully inspected the fence and even managed to reinforce it in a few places.

I reached Pine Cliffs towards the very end of the fight and was unable, neither by showing myself nor by firing into the air, to save the wonderful deer. Grey Eyes and Black Back were at the very edge of the cliff, overhanging the reef. The fight would, of course, have been over long before had Grey Eyes had antlers. Not being able to parry blows with his antlers, he had taken a lot of punishment on his unprotected neck. So when his front legs buckled from loss of blood, more blood flowed in a stream from his mouth. Black Back butted him in the side, piercing his heart, but at the last moment Grey Eyes suddenly rose and unexpectedly, with the last ounce of his strength, butted Black Back so hard that he slipped and fell over the cliff to the reef, bouncing like a ball from rock to rock. Grey Eyes managed also to look down and perhaps saw how the crests of the waves that beat eternally restless against the reef went pink. Grey Eyes then himself rocked and fell.

I heard the dry crunch of bones, the sound of animals

snorting, and of stones clattering down the cliff. And all those deer were mine.

Ten years have passed since I used the tame Hua-lu to help me catch a large number of stags and I began to set up a large antler farm. My friend did not come and I built it alone. Another year went by, I was still alone and never knew a moment's rest. Yet another year.... It can happen that after you have waited for long enough, you begin thinking of some live person you know well as dead. It can then happen that when both you and your friend have changed beyond recognition in external appearance, you meet somewhere by chance. It's terrible! Startled, turning pale, you begin to guess at something familiar in the other's features, marked by time, and at last recognise each other by your voices. Little by little, you go deeper into the past with your friend, gradually and unconsciously beginning to forgive someone as it were. Your heart becomes very light and, at last, the long-awaited meeting takes place: prompted by renewed joie-de-vivre, both friends become as young as they once were for each other. That is how I understand the effect of the root of life, of Ginseng. Sometimes, however, the root's vital power is so great that you find a beloved person lost once and forever in someone else and begin to love this new person as much as the lost friend. That, I consider, is also an effect of the root of life, of Ginseng. Any other understanding of the mysterious root I consider to be either superstition or else simply medicinal. Thus as time passed, one year after the other, and my friend still did not come, I began to forget and in the end completely forgot that my own root of life was still growing somewhere in the taiga. Everything all around me had changed: the settlement on the bank of the Zusu-hé had turned into a small town and all sorts of people now lived there. I frequently travel about my important business to Moscow, to Tokyo, to Shanghai. And on the streets of those cities, I remember my Ginseng more often than in the taiga. Together with all the other workers of the new culture, I feel that the root of life has travelled to our fields of creation from its native taiga, that in our taiga of artistic, scientific, and useful endeavour, seekers after the root of life are closer to their aim than seekers after the wonderful root in the primeval taiga.

My work involves me deeply and this, of course, saves me from feeling sick at heart. An end is at last coming to my male loneliness. We meet and for a long time are unable to say a true word to each other. Here was the tree on which she had once sat and collected lovely sea urchin shells hung on its branches by waves and typhoons. Now the Zusu-hé has brought so much sand to the tree that only the faintest traces indicate the spot where the lovely deer turned into a woman for me. We stood silently there, on the shore, near the ocean's white lace, under the measured passage of greater time, together with sea urchins, shells, and stars, learning the brief count of our human pendulum.

How quickly are mountains worn down! There a cliff once hung, and beneath it deer, wapitis, raccoons, and we too, arm in arm, together with the beasts and following the same path, walked down to the seashore, to the salty water. The typhoons have now brought that cliff down and the path now winds around its scattered stones. A research laboratory now stands on the spot where Luven's hut with its paper windows once stood. It is a large building with wide Italianate windows. Of the great antler farm with its metal-net fences several kilometres long, cutting off the whole of Misty Hill, there now remain only a few of the original deer. Hua-lu, however, is alive and wanders around quite freely, like a domestic animal.

We walked up to Luven's grave beneath an immense cedar tree. In the tree the Chinese have carved a small shrine, where they perform rituals and burn paper spills and incense. It was by that tree, while talking about the life of the kind person I loved so dearly, that I suddenly remembered my Ginseng root growing somewhere not far from the Singing Valley. Why should we not now go and look at the Ginseng, just out of curiosity? And so the two of us set off to look again for the root I had once found.

Of course, I had long ago forgotten the marks left by Luven but I knew that we had to pass through the Valley of the Seven Peaks and turn into the third Bear Ravine to get to the Singing Valley. So we walked through the first valley and climbed up the ravine to the very top of the hill. Everything was as before in the Singing Valley: the same sparse but immense trees with great sunny glades and singing birds. But when we went down the Singing Valley, following the ancient

terraces, to the thicker woods where the grasses that preferred shade grew, I got lost. We wandered up and down for a long time in the hope of finding the spot where Luven and I had sat for a long time in silence.

How many times have I found it easier to locate some lost spot at night than in the daytime. I might go further and say that when you find in yourself some question posed ages earlier, and suddenly the extremely strong smell of mushrooms reminds you that the question arose at just such a moment when there was a smell of mushrooms, then you are getting warm, then you take a careful look around and remember. And that is precisely what happened on this occasion when we had at last felt our way to the right place and our calm conversation had ceased.

"Speak, speak, speak, speak!" the cry rose from the brook.

And all the musicians, all the living beings in the Singing Valley struck up, burst into song, and the whole animate silence opened up and called:

"Speak, speak, speak, speak!"

In that instant I caught sight of the trunk of the wild apple tree which Luven and I had once used to scramble over to the other side of the brook. I recalled every last detail now. At the very spot where we had knelt—he was praying and I thinking—we too now stopped and carefully began examining the leaves of the shade-loving plants. We were so engrossed in our work, so excited, that the slight tension that had existed between us disappeared completely. We were rapidly drawing closer together and suddenly I saw the ginseng! I spent a long time making an exact copy of the cedar bark box I had seen long before in the possession of Manchurians. Then we used bast to hold the pieces of bark together. Careful not to damage so much as a single fibril, we dug up the root and it was very similar to the one the Manchurians had had: it looked like a naked man, having arms and legs. There were fibrils like fingers at the end of its arms and it also had a neck, and a head with a plait on it. We filled a box with the earth in which the root had grown and packed the root with great care before going back to the spot where Luven and I had once sat. There we listened to the animate silence and each thought his own thoughts. Now, we could not sit independently in silence for long and the brook began singing again.

“Speak, speak, speak, speak!”

The musicians of the Singing Valley started to play and we had a good talk together.

I do not really like to admit this, but having begun, I must go on to the end with my disclosure. It was not the same woman who had come to me but I say that the power of the root is so strong that I found in her my own being and fell in love with this different woman as if she were the one I had longed for in my youth. Yes, it seems to me that in this there lies the creative force of the root of life: that it brings one out of oneself, makes one discover oneself in someone else.

Now I have an eternally interesting job, a job I myself created and in which I feel as if we, armed with knowledge and a modern and peculiarly strong need for love, are returning to the same work which our wild ancestors engaged in at the dawn of our culture: the taming of wild animals. I seek daily for any opportunity to unite the methods derived from the knowledge we have today with the force of affection and attention that I have borrowed from Luven. Thus I have my own enticing job. I have my friend-wife and sweet children. If I look at people and at how they live then I can call myself one of the happiest men on this earth. But once again, let me repeat: having begun, I must go on to the end with my disclosure! There is one small thing in my life which, if looked at from the outside, does not have anything to do with its general course, yet this trifle, it sometimes seems to me, is as basic a creative drive as the shedding of their antlers is to deer. Every year—and always during the misty spring period when the deer shed their old and now dead bony antlers—I too, like them, go through a sort of renewal. For a few days I cannot work either in the laboratory or in the library and neither can I find rest or relaxation in my happy family. Some kind of blind force, a sharp pain and a yearning, drives me out of the house and makes me wander about the woods and in the hills until eventually I without fail always end up on a particular cliff. This cliff has innumerable cracks in its surface and from these moisture seeps, as if from tear glands, and forms large drops so that it looks as if the cliff is eternally weeping. I know perfectly well that this is stone and not a living being, that stone cannot feel, but all the same I feel so close to it in my heart that I can hear something beating away inside it and then I remember my past and

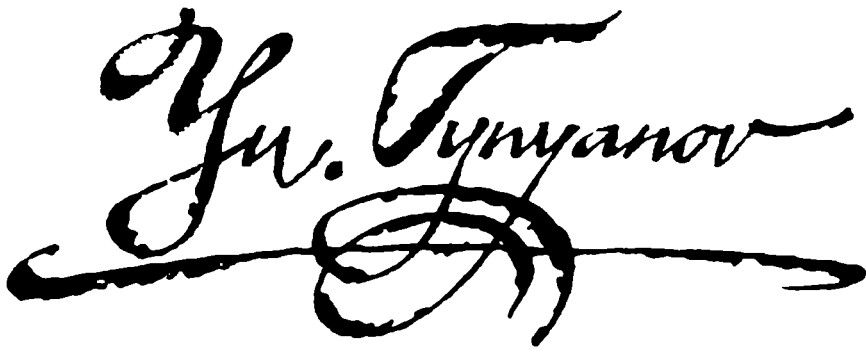
become absolutely the same person as I was in my youth. Before my eyes Hua-lu puts a hoof through into my vine arbour. All the past with all its pain comes back to me and then I speak out loud to my real friend, the heart-cliff, as if nothing at all has changed since then:

“Hunter, hunter, why did you not grab her by the hoof then?”

It is as if I, during those painful days, shed all I have created from myself, like the deer do their antlers, and afterwards I return to my laboratory, to my family, and begin working again, begin to enter, together with other toilers, with the nameless and the famous, little by little, into the approaching dawn of a new and better life for people on this earth.

1932

Translated by David Sinclair-Loutit



(b. 1894, Rezhitsa near
Vitebsk—d. 1943, Moscow)

Although Yuri Tynyanov came to the notice of the critics and the public in his lifetime, it was only after his death that they understood the real calibre of this remarkable man who was a brilliant philologist and a talented historical novelist.

Tynyanov's first novel, KYUKHLYA (1925), was also one of the first historical novels in Soviet Russian literature. His technique of handling authentic material set a leading new trend in Soviet literature: strict reliance on documents, concentration on the progressive personalities of history, and psychologically accurate but free flights of fancy wherever the strict framework of the documents allowed. In his next novel, THE DEATH OF VAZIR MUKHTAR (1928), Tynyanov undertook the difficult task of telling the life-story of Alexander Griboyedov, the Russian poetic genius. The author followed a completely untrodden path: it was not the "ceremonial", official image of a marble-cold classic writer that he gave us, but the profoundly tragic

personality of the man who wrote the brilliant comedy *WIT WORKS WOE* and who never even saw it published in his lifetime. He re-created the historical paradox that arose when, a very close friend of the revolutionary Decembrists who opposed the autocracy, he found himself, as a plenipotentiary minister, called upon to implement the policy of that same autocracy in the East. These novels, together with his novel *PUSHKIN* and his story "Second Lieutenant Snamely" have become Soviet literary classics. A man with a keen and penetrating intellect, Tynyanov was able to suggest, with one small detail, the whole historical pattern of the phenomena behind it. Thus, for instance, with the clerk's mistake in "Second Lieutenant Snamely" he ruthlessly exposed the deathly bureaucratic nature of the tsarist autocracy and ridiculed the power which attributed more importance to the letter than to the reality.

Second Lieutenant Snamely

1

The Emperor Paul was snoozing at the open window. In the postprandial hour, when the food was slowly struggling with the body, any kind of disturbance was forbidden. He was dozing in a high armchair, shielded at the back and sides by a glass screen. Pavel Petrovich was having his usual after-dinner dream.

He is sitting in his well-trimmed little garden at Gatchina, and a chubby Cupid in the corner is watching him as he dines with his family. Then a creaking sound is heard in the distance. It travels over the bumps and holes in the road, monotonously bouncing up and down. Pavel Petrovich sees a three-cornered hat in the distance, a horse galloping, the shafts of a two-wheeled carriage, and dust. He hides under the table, since the three-cornered hat is a messenger. They are galloping from St. Petersburg to fetch him.

"*Nous sommes perdus!...*"¹ he cries hoarsely to his wife from under the table to make her hide too.

It is suffocating under the table and the creaking is already there, the two-wheeler is putting its shafts down on him.

The messenger peers under the table, sees Pavel Petrovich there and says:

"Your Majesty. Her Majesty your mother has died."

But as soon as Pavel Petrovich begins crawling out from under the table, the messenger cracks him on the forehead and shouts:

"Guard!"

Pavel Petrovich waved him away and caught a fly in his hand.

There he sat, staring with grey, bulging eyes out of the window in the Pavlovskoye palace, suffocating with food and misery and listening intently while the fly buzzed in his fist.

Someone was shouting "Guard!" under the window.

2

The army clerk in the offices of the Preobrazhensky Regiment has been banished to Siberia as a punishment.

¹ We are undone! (Fr.).— *Tr.*

The new clerk, a mere boy, was sitting at a table and writing. His hand was shaking because he was late.

He had to finish copying an Order for the regiment at six o'clock precisely so that the duty adjutant could take it to the palace, where his Majesty's adjutant, having attached the Order to others like it, would present them to the Emperor at nine. It was a criminal offence to be late. The regimental clerk had risen early, but he had spoilt the Order and was now making another copy. In the first copy, he had made two mistakes: he had entered Lieutenant Sinyukhaev as deceased, since Sinyukhaev came immediately after the deceased Major Sokolov; and he had made a foolish blunder: instead of "The following second lieutenants, namely: Steven, Rybin and Azanchev are detailed", he had written: "The following: Second Lieutenant Snamely, Steven, Rybin and Azanchev are detailed". Just as he had been writing "Second Lieutenants", an officer had walked in, the clerk had jumped up to attention in front of him, had stopped in mid-word and then, on sitting down to resume copying the Order, had muddled it up and written: "Second Lieutenant Snamely".

He knew that if the Order was not ready by six o'clock, the adjutant would shout, "Seize him!" and he would be seized. As a result, his hand was stiff, he was writing more and more slowly, and suddenly he made a big, beautiful blot like a fountain on the Order.

He only had ten minutes left.

Leaning back, the clerk looked at the clock as if it were a human being and then, with fingers that seemed detached from his body and to be moving of their own accord, he began hunting through the papers for a clean sheet, although there were no clean sheets there at all, since they were lying in the cupboard, folded very neatly into a bundle.

But, already desperate and only rummaging about in the papers for decency's sake, he froze for the second time.

The other equally important paper had also been copied out incorrectly.

According to Imperial Memorandum No. 940 on the non-usage of words in reports, he should have used, not the word "review", but *inspect*; not "carry out", but *execute*; not "sentries", but *guard*; and he should in no circumstance write "squad", but should replace it with *détachement*.

For civil edicts, there was a stipulation to write not "degree", but *class*; not "society" but *assembly*, and instead of "citizen" to use the word *merchant* or *townsman*.

But this had been written in small script under Memorandum No. 940, which was hanging on the wall right in front of the clerk's eyes, and he had not read it; but he had read about "review" et cetera and had committed it all firmly to memory on his very first day.

However, in the paper prepared for signature by the regimental commanding officer before despatch to Baron Arakcheyev, he had written:

Having *reviewed*, on your Excellency's instructions the *squads* of sentries assigned specially to duties in and outside St. Petersburg, I have the honour to report that all this has been *carried out*...

And that was by no means all.

The first line of the report already copied by him ran as follows:

Your Excellency, My Dear Sir,

Even a small child was aware that this form of address, when written in one line, was tantamount to a command; but in reports from a subordinate, especially to a person like Baron Arakcheyev, it could only be written in two lines:

Your Excellency,

My Dear Sir,

which indicated subordination and politeness.

And if he could have been taken to task for *having reviewed* and the other mistakes that he had not noticed in time, *My Dear Sir* was a blunder that he himself had made while copying.

And so, no longer aware of what he was doing, the clerk sat down to correct this paper. In copying it out, he momentarily forgot about the Order, although it was the more urgent.

When the adjutant's runner arrived for the Order, the clerk looked at the clock and the runner and suddenly handed him the list in which Lieutenant Sinyukhaev was entered as deceased.

Then he sat down and, still trembling, wrote: *excellencies, détachements, guards*.

3

Punctually at nine o'clock, a bell rang in the palace as the Emperor tugged the cord. Punctually at nine, his Majesty's adjutant went to Pavel Petrovich with the usual report. Pavel Petrovich was sitting in the same position as on the previous day, at the window, with a glass screen placed round him.

He was neither sleeping nor dozing, however, and there was a different expression on his face.

Like everyone else in the palace, the adjutant knew that the Emperor was wroth. He likewise knew that wrath seeks causes, and the more it finds, the more inflamed it becomes. Under no circumstances, therefore, could the report be missed out.

Drawing himself up to attention before the glass screen and the Emperor's back, he delivered his report.

Pavel Petrovich did not turn to look at the adjutant. His breathing was slow and laboured.

A whole day's enquiries yesterday had failed to elicit who had shouted "Guard!" under his window, and twice during the night he had woken up with the miseries.

"Guard!" was a foolish shout, and at first Pavel Petrovich had not been particularly angry, like anyone who has had a bad dream and has been prevented from seeing it through to the end. After all, a happy ending to a dream at least means good fortune. Then he was curious: who had shouted "Guard!" right underneath his window, and why? When no one in the palace, which was thrown into a great panic, could find the person concerned, the Emperor's wrath was great indeed. Things had come to such a pass that in the very palace, after dinner-time, a man could cause a disturbance and remain undiscovered. Furthermore, no one knew why the word "Guard!" had been shouted. Perhaps it had been the cry of a repentant ill-doer. Or perhaps, out there in the shrubbery already combed three times, a man had been gagged and strangled. He had apparently disappeared into thin air. It would be a good idea to.... But there was no point if the man had not been found.

It would be a good idea to increase the guard, and not only here.

Without turning round, Pavel Petrovich stared at the rectangular green shrubs, almost identical to those at Trianon. They had been trimmed, and yet there was no knowing who was in them.

Without looking at the adjutant, he threw back his right hand. The adjutant knew what this meant: during spells of big wrath, the Emperor did not turn round. He deftly deposited the Order for the Preobrazhensky Guards Regiment in the Emperor's hand, and Pavel Petrovich began to read it carefully. The hand was then thrown back again, and the adjutant picked up the pen from the little desk without making a sound, dipped it in the inkwell, shook it and lightly placed it on the hand, staining himself with ink as he did so. The signed sheet of paper soon floated back to the adjutant, who now proceeded to tender the sheets of paper, and the papers, read through and signed or merely read, sailed back one after another to the adjutant. He was getting used to this procedure and was hoping that it would be all right this time too, when the Emperor jumped down off his high chair.

With small steps, he ran towards the adjutant. His face was red and his eyes were dark.

He went straight up to the adjutant and sniffed him. This was what the Emperor used to do when he was suspicious. Then, with thumb and forefinger, he firmly plucked the adjutant by the sleeve and pinched him.

The adjutant stood straight with the papers in hand.

"You don't know your job, Sir," said Pavel huskily. "You're sneaking up from behind."

He pinched him again.

"I'll knock that Potemkin¹ spirit out of you. Get out!"

The adjutant backed through the doorway.

As soon as the door closed soundlessly, Pavel Petrovich quickly undid his neckerchief and began slowly tearing the shirt on his chest; his mouth was twisted and his lips were quivering.

This was the beginning of a *great wrath*.

4

The Order for the Preobrazhensky Guards Regiment, as signed by the Emperor, had been angrily corrected by him.

¹ Potemkin—a powerful court favourite in the time of Catherine II.—*Ed.*

The words "*Second Lieutenant Snamely*", *Steven, Rybin* and *Azanchev*" had been altered by the Emperor, who had struck out several letters and written over them: "Second Lieutenant Snamely to the guard." The rest had met with no objections.

The Order was handed over.

When the commanding officer received it, he spent a long time trying to recall a junior officer with the peculiar surname of Snamely. He immediately consulted a list of all the officers in the Preobrazhensky Regiment, but no such name was to be found. It wasn't even among the rank and file. He couldn't make sense of this at all. Only one clerk in the whole world understood properly, but no one asked him and he did not tell anyone. The Emperor's order, however, had to be carried out; yet it could not be, because there was no Second Lieutenant Snamely anywhere in the regiment.

The commanding officer wondered whether he should approach Baron Arakcheyev. But he dismissed the idea at once. The Baron lived in Gatchina, and the outcome was uncertain in any case. There was no knowing which way things might turn.

Since, in times of distress, it was the done thing to resort to one's relatives, the commanding officer quickly remembered his kinship with Sablukov, His Majesty's adjutant, and galloped off to Pavlovskoye.

There was a great confusion at Pavlovskoye and at first the adjutant did not want to receive the commanding officer. Then he listened to him distastefully and was about to send him to Hades—as if he hadn't enough worries already—when he suddenly frowned, threw a glance at the commanding officer, and his expression suddenly changed: it became obsessed.

"Don't report to the Emperor," he said slowly. "Consider Second Lieutenant Snamely a living person. Assign him to the guard."

Without so much as a further glance at the flabbergasted commanding officer, he left him to the mercy of fate, drew himself up and walked away.

5

Lieutenant Sinyukhaev was far from well-off. His father was doctor to Baron Arakcheyev, and the Baron, in reward

for the pills that restored his vitality, had covertly wangled the doctor's son into the regiment. The Baron liked the son's straightforward and dim-witted attitude. He was not on close terms with anyone in the regiment, but he did not shun his comrades either. He was not talkative, liked tobacco, did not consort with women and, what almost amounted to unofficer-like conduct, enjoyed playing the oboe d'amore.

His accoutrements were always spick and span.

When the regimental Order was being read out, Sinyukhaev was standing rigidly at attention, as usual, and was not thinking about anything at all.

Suddenly, he heard his name and his ears twitched, as often happens with horses that have turned pensive and suddenly feel a flick of the knout.

"Lieutenant Sinyukhaev, having died of a fever, to be considered out of the service."

At this point, the commanding officer, who was reading out the Order, happened to glance at the spot where Sinyukhaev invariably stood, and the hand with the sheet of paper in it slowly sank down.

Sinyukhaev was standing in his place as always. However, the commanding officer, after a brief pause, began reading the Order again—true, not quite so distinctly: he read about Steven, Azancheyev, Snamely, and he read it to the end. Drill commenced, and Sinyukhaev ought to have been moving with all the others in the exercises; but he stayed where he was instead.

He was used to listening to the words of the Orders as something special and not as human speech. They had no sense, no meaning, but a life and power of their own. It wasn't a question of whether the Order was carried out or not. An Order somehow changed regiments, streets and people, even if it was not carried out.

When he heard the words of the Order, he stayed put at first, like a man who has not quite heard aright. He strained to hear the words, then stopped having doubts. They had been reading about him. When his column marched off, he began to doubt whether he was really alive or not.

Aware of his hand resting on the hilt of his sword, of a certain discomfort from the tightly drawn shoulder straps, and of the weight of his pigtail, freshly greased that day, he seemed to be alive; but at the same time he knew that

something was wrong somewhere, something had been irrevocably ruined. It never even occurred to him that there might be a mistake in the Order. On the contrary, it seemed to him that he was still alive owing to a mistake, a blunder. As a result of his own negligence, he had failed to notice something and had not told anyone about it.

In any case, he ruined all the drill exercises by standing on the square like a post. He did not even think of getting out of the way.

As soon as drill was over, the commanding officer flew at the lieutenant. He was red in the face. It was sheer good luck that, owing to the hot weather, the Emperor himself had not been present during drill, since he was resting at Pavlovskoye. The commanding officer wanted to yell, "To the guard-house!"—but to relieve himself of his wrath he needed a more resonant sound, and he was just about to roll the r's in "Arrest!", when his mouth snapped shut as if he had suddenly swallowed a fly. He stood like this in front of Lieutenant Sinyukhaev for a good two minutes.

Then, recoiling as if from someone with the plague, he departed.

He had remembered that Lieutenant Sinyukhaev, as deceased, had been removed from the rolls, and he had restrained himself because he did not know the correct manner in which to address such a person.

6

Pavel Petrovich was pacing up and down his room, only stopping from time to time.

He was listening intently.

Since the Emperor in dusty boots and travelling cape had tramped with jingling spurs across the hall in which his mother was still wheezing and had slammed the door, it had been observed that the big wrath would turn into a great wrath, and a great wrath usually ended about two days later with terror or tenderness.

The chimeras on the staircases in Pavlovskoye had been done by the wild Brenna, but the ceilings and walls of the palace were the work of Cameron, the lover of gentle colours that melt before the eyes of all who behold them. And so on one side were the gaping maws of rampant, human-faced lions, and on the other—a feeling of elegance.

In addition, two lanterns hung in the palace hall, a present from the recently beheaded Louis XVI. He had received this gift in France when he was still wandering about under the name of Count Severny.

The lanterns were of exquisite workmanship: the panels were specially designed to soften the glare.

But Pavel Petrovich avoided lighting them.

There was also a clock, a present from Marie-Antoinette, on a jasper table. The hour hand was a gold Saturn with a long scythe, and the minute hand a Cupid with an arrow.

When the clock struck midday and midnight, the Saturn covered the Cupid's arrow with his scythe. This meant that Time conquers Love.

Be that as it may, the clock was never wound up.

And so it was Brenna in the garden, Cameron on the walls, and overhead, in the space under the ceiling, the swaying lantern from Louis XVI.

During a great wrath, Pavel Petrovich even acquired a superficial resemblance to one of Brenna's lions.

In the course of these bouts, canes lashed completely out of the blue down on whole regiments, someone's head was cut off on the Don by torchlight, and hapless soldiers, clerks, lieutenants, generals and governor-generals were marched to Siberia.

His mother, who had usurped the throne,¹ was dead. He had beaten out the spirit of Potemkin, just as Ivan IV had beaten out that of the boyars. He had scattered Potemkin's bones to the four winds and levelled his grave. He had even eliminated his mother's taste. The taste of a usurper! Gold, rooms decorated with Indian silk, rooms decorated with porcelain, with Dutch stoves, and a room of dark-blue glass—the smoking room. The Roman and Greek medallions of which she was so proud. He ordered them to be used as gilt for his castle.

And yet there was still an after-taste.

It could be sensed everywhere, and perhaps that was why Pavel Petrovich was in the habit of sniffing those to whom he was talking.

And the French hanging lantern swayed overhead.

¹ With the support of the Guards, the Empress Catherine II had overthrown her husband, Peter III, in a palace coup.—*Ed.*

Terror began to overcome him. The Emperor was short of breath. He did not fear his wife or his elder sons, each of whom, remembering the example of their merry grandmother and their mother-in-law, could transfix him with a table fork and ascend the throne.

He was not afraid of the suspiciously cheerful ministers and suspiciously gloomy generals. He did not fear a soul among that rabble, fifty million of them, who lurked in the tussocks in the marshes, sands and fields of his empire and whom he simply could not visualise. He was not afraid of them, taken separately. But taken together, they were a sea in which he was drowning.

He gave instructions for his St. Petersburg castle to be ringed with ditches and outposts and for a drawbridge to be erected. But even the chains could not be trusted—they were guarded by sentries.

And when the great wrath was turning into a great terror, the criminal justice department began to function, and someone would be strung up by the arms, and the floor would open up under someone else's feet, and the executioners would be waiting for him below.

Consequently, when short footsteps alternating with long and suddenly erratic ones were heard in the Emperor's room, all exchanged glances of dismay and hardly anyone smiled.

There was a great terror in the room.

The Emperor was wandering about.

7

Lieutenant Sinyukhaev was standing exactly where he had been when the commanding officer had descended on him to curse him to high heaven, had not done so, but had stopped so unexpectedly.

There was nobody about him.

Usually, after drill, he relaxed, stood at ease, let his arms fall by his sides and made his leisurely way to the barracks. Each limb became free: he was now a private person.

At home, in the officers' barracks, the lieutenant would unbutton his coat and play his oboe d'amore. Then he would fill his pipe and look out of the window. He would see a large part of the felled orchard where there was now a wilderness called Tsaritsyn Meadow. There was no variety on the field,

no green, but the traces of horses and soldiers were preserved on the sand. Smoking was a pleasure to him in every way: filling the pipe, pressing the tobacco down, inhaling and exhaling the smoke. With smoking, a man could never get into trouble. This would be enough, since evening would be quickly drawing on and he would go to visit friends or simply to take a stroll.

He loved the courtesy of the ordinary people. A citizen once said to him when he sneezed: "Bless you!"

Before going to sleep, he would sit down to play cards with his batman. He had taught the latter to play, and when the batman lost, his lieutenant hit him on the nose with the pack of cards, but when he himself lost, he didn't hit his batman. Finally, he looked over his accoutrements after they had been cleaned by the batman, twisted, plaited and greased his pigtail himself, and then lay down to sleep.

But this time, the lieutenant did not relax, his muscles were tense, and no breathing could be heard coming from his tightly compressed lips. He began looking round at the drill square and it seemed unfamiliar to him. Certainly, he had never before noticed the cornices over the windows of the red municipal building or the dull glass panes.

The round cobblestones on the square all looked different from each other, like different brothers.

Very neat and tidy in all its grey precision, soldierly St. Petersburg lay before him with its wilderness, its rivers and the dull eyes of the pavement—a city completely strange to him.

He then realised that he was dead.

8

Pavel Petrovich heard the adjutant's footsteps, slunk like a cat up to the armchair behind the glass screen and sat on it as firmly as if he had been in it all the time.

He knew the footsteps of those close to him. Sitting with his back to them, he could tell the foot-scraping of the assured, the hopping of the flatterers and the light, airy footsteps of the terrified. Straightforward footsteps he never heard.

This time the adjutant was walking with assurance; he was scraping his feet. Pavel Petrovich turned his head a little way.

The adjutant went as far as the middle of the screen and bowed his head.

"Your Majesty. It was Second Lieutenant Snamely who shouted for the guard."

"Who is he?"

The terror abated; it was being given a name.

The adjutant was not expecting this question and he recoiled slightly.

"The second lieutenant detailed for guard duties, your Majesty."

"Why was he shouting?" The Emperor stamped his foot. "I await your answer, Sir."

The adjutant was silent.

"Out of foolishness."

"Instigate an enquiry; have him whipped and marched to Siberia."

9

Thus began the life of Second Lieutenant Snamely.

When the clerk was copying out the Order, Second Lieutenant Snamely had been a mistake, a slip of the pen and nothing more. It could have been overlooked and lost in a sea of papers; and since the Order was not of the slightest interest, it is doubtful whether later historians would have bothered to reproduce it.

The capricious eye of Pavel Petrovich had singled it out and given it a doubtful life—the misprint had become a second lieutenant without a face, but with a surname.

Then, in the adjutant's disjointed thoughts, a face also took shape—true, scarcely visible, as in a dream. It was he who had shouted "Guard!" under the palace window.

Now this face had become solid and acquired features: Second Lieutenant Snamely, as it turned out, was a miscreant who had been condemned to the rack or, at best, to the whipping post and then Siberia.

This was reality.

Until now, he had been the clerk's worry, the commanding officer's distraction and the adjutant's resourcefulness.

From now on, the whipping post, the lash and the journey to Siberia were his own personal concern.

The order had to be carried out. Second Lieutenant Snamely had to be removed from the army's jurisdiction,

transferred to that of the courts, and then he had to proceed along the green road direct to Siberia.

And so it was done.

In the regiment whose rolls he was on, the commanding officer called out the name of Second Lieutenant Snamely in front of the lines in the voice of thunder that can only come from someone completely at a loss.

The whipping post was already standing ready on one side, and two guardsmen had bound it with straps above and below. Two guardsmen, one on each side, were whipping the smooth wood with seven-tailed lashes, a third was counting the strokes, and the regiment looked on.

Since the wood had already been polished smooth by thousands of bellies, the post did not seem entirely vacant. Although there was no one in front of it, it still looked as though there was. Frowning, the soldiers stared at the silent post. The commanding officer went red in the face towards the end of the punishment and his nostrils flared, as always.

Then the straps were unfastened and someone's shoulders seemed to have been released from the post. Two guardsmen went up to it and awaited orders.

They marched down the street, leaving the regiment at a steady pace with their rifles on their shoulders, and very occasionally they glanced sideways—not at one another, but at the space between them.

A young soldier was standing on parade; he had only been recruited recently. He looked at the punishment with interest. He thought that everything that had been happening was normal and frequent in military service.

But in the evening he suddenly started tossing and turning on his bunk and quietly asked the old guardsman next to him:

"Hey, Dad, who's our Emperor?"

"Pavel Petrovich, you ass," replied the old man in a fright.

"Have you ever seen him?"

"I have," growled the old man, "and you'll see him too."

They fell silent. But the old soldier could not get to sleep. He kept turning over and over in his bunk. About ten minutes went by.

"Why are you asking?" the old soldier suddenly demanded of the young one.

"I don't know," replied the other readily enough. "They keep saying 'the Emperor', but who he is, no one knows."

Maybe it's just rumours..."

"Ass," said the old man, and he glanced all round him. "Shut up, you bumpkin."

Another ten minutes passed. It was dark and quiet in the barracks.

"He does exist," said the old man suddenly in the young one's ear, "except that he's a fake."

10

Lieutenant Sinyukhaev looked intently at the room in which he had been living until now.

It was spacious, with a low ceiling and with a portrait of a middle-aged man in spectacles and wearing a small pigtail. This was the lieutenant's father, the surgeon Sinyukhaev.

He was living in Gatchina, but the lieutenant, as he looked at the portrait, did not feel absolutely sure of this. Perhaps he was living and perhaps he wasn't.

Then he looked at the things that belonged to Lieutenant Sinyukhaev: the oboe d'amore in its wooden case, the curling tongs, the jar of powder and the sand sprinkler. These objects returned his gaze. He turned his eyes away from them.

He stood like this in the middle of the room, waiting for something. He was unlikely to be waiting for the batman.

Meanwhile the batman cautiously walked into the room and stopped before the lieutenant. He opened his mouth slightly and stood there, staring at the officer.

He had probably always stood like that while awaiting orders, but the lieutenant looked at him as if seeing him for the first time and hung his head.

Death ought to be concealed temporarily, like a crime. That evening, a young man came into the room, sat at the table with the oboe d'amore, took it out of its case, blew into it and, having failed to produce a sound of any kind, stowed it away in a corner.

Then, calling the batman, he asked for ale. He never once looked at Lieutenant Sinyukhaev.

The lieutenant then asked in an embarrassed voice:

"Who are you?"

As he drank his ale, the young man replied with a yawn:

"Auditor of the Cadet School at the Senate," and ordered the batman to make the bed. Then he began to get undressed,

and for a long time Sinyukhaev watched as the auditor nimbly pulled off his shoes and dropped them with a thump, unbuttoned his clothing, then covered himself with the blanket and yawned. After stretching, the young man finally suddenly looked at Sinyukhaev's hand and drew a handkerchief from the cuff of the sleeve. Having blown his nose, he yawned again.

Finally, Lieutenant Sinyukhaev recovered himself and said languidly that this was against Regulations.

The auditor impassively objected that, on the contrary, everything was according to Regulations, that he was acting in accordance with Article Two, since the erstwhile Sinyukhaev "had died", and the lieutenant should remove his uniform, which seemed a "pretty decent one" to the auditor, and that the other should put on the uniform which was not suitable for wear.

Lieutenant Sinyukhaev began taking off his uniform and the auditor helped him, explaining that the late Sinyukhaev himself might do this "incorrectly".

Then the erstwhile Sinyukhaev put on the uniform that was unsuitable for wear and stood there, fearful that the auditor might take his gloves. He had long yellow uniform gloves with square fingers. To lose one's gloves was a disgrace, he had heard. In gloves, a lieutenant, whoever he might be, was still a lieutenant. And so, drawing them on, the former Sinyukhaev turned round and left the room.

All night he wandered round the streets of St. Petersburg, not even attempting to visit anyone. In the morning, he felt tired and sat down on the ground near a house. He dozed for a few minutes, then suddenly jumped to his feet without looking to either side.

He soon crossed the city limits. A sleepy clerk at the barrier absent-mindedly wrote down his name.

He never returned to the barracks again.

11

The adjutant was crafty and did not tell anyone about Second Lieutenant Snamely or about his own successful solution to the problem. Like everyone else, he had his enemies. He consequently mentioned only to one or two people that the man who had shouted "Guard!" had been found.

But this had a strange effect on the feminine half of the palace.

Two wings, as rounded as cat's paws when the cat is playing with a mouse, had been added to the front of the palace built by Cameron, with its upper columns as slender as fingers playing the clavicord. In one wing, Nelidova, the lady-in-waiting, operated with her staff.

Guiltily walking past the guard, Pavel Petrovich often went to that wing, and the sentries once saw him leaving in haste, his periwig askew and a woman's slipper flying over his head.

Although Nelidova was only a lady-in-waiting, she had ladies-in-waiting of her own.

And so, when the rumour reached the women's wing that the man who had shouted "Guard!" had been found, one of Nelidova's ladies-in-waiting fell into a brief swoon.

She was, like Nelidova, as curly-haired and slim as a shepherd boy.

In the time of Elisabeth, Paul's grandmother, the ladies-in-waiting wore brocade that crackled and silks that rustled, with their emancipated nipples peeping out in fright. It was the fashion.

The Amazons who loved men's clothing, velvet seamen's hat ribbons and stars on their nipples, disappeared with the woman who had usurped the throne.

Women now became curly-haired shepherds.

And so one of them collapsed in a brief swoon.

Helped to her feet by her mistress and recovering consciousness, she said that, at the time, she had had a rendez-vous with an officer. She was unable, however, to absent herself from the upper storey and suddenly, looking out of the window, she saw the inflamed officer, all caution thrown to the winds, or perhaps not realising it, standing at the Emperor's own window and signalling to her.

She waved to him and feigned horror with her eyes, but the lover took this to mean that he had become obnoxious to her and pathetically shouted "Guard!"

Immediately, without losing her composure, she flattened her nose with her finger and pointed downwards. After this indication of a snub nose, the officer was horrified and vanished.

She did not see him again and, owing to the speed with which the love affair had taken place the evening before, she did not even know his surname.

Now they had found him and sent him to Siberia.

Nelidova began to do some hard thinking.

Her luck was on the wane, and although she did not want to admit it even to herself, her slipper could not fly through the air any more.

She was cold to the adjutant and she did not want to approach him. The Emperor's state of mind was doubtful. In such cases, she usually turned to a certain civilian but highly influential personage, Yuri Alexandrovich Neledinsky-Meletsky.

She did so this time, and sent a lackey to him with a note.

The burly lackey, who was not taking such notes for the first time, never ceased to marvel at the insignificant physical size of the powerful person. Meletsky was a singer and a state secretary. He could sing "Swiftly flowing stream" and was sensually inclined towards shepherdesses. He was of diminutive height, his mouth was voluptuous and his brows were shaggy. But he was also a great intriguer and, looking up at the broad-shouldered lackey, he said:

"Tell them not to worry. Let them wait. This will all resolve itself."

But he was a little afraid himself, since he did not really know how it was going to resolve itself, and he scowled ferociously when one of his young shepherdesses, formerly named Avdotia but now known as Selimena, edged through the door.

Yuri Alexandrovich's household staff consisted mostly of young shepherdesses.

12

The sentries marched on and on.

From barrier to barrier, from outpost to fort, they continued straight ahead and kept glancing with apprehension at the important space walking between them.

It was not the first time they had escorted a banished prisoner to Siberia, but they had never had to take one like this before. When they crossed the city bounds, they had doubts. There was no sound of chains and there was no need to egg the convict on with their musket butts. But then they remembered that it was a government mission and they had the paper with them. They talked little, since conversation was forbidden.

At the first outpost, the superintendant looked at them as if they were crazy, and they felt embarrassed. But the senior of the two produced the document in which it was stated that the man under arrest was a secret and had no form, and the superintendant got busy and set aside for them a special room for the night with three bunks. He avoided talking to them and was so servile that the sentries involuntarily became conscious of their own importance.

They approached the second outpost, a big one, with complete confidence and silent solemnity, and the senior simply flung the paper on to the commandant's desk. He, in his turn, put himself out and was as obliging as the one before.

They gradually began to realise that they were escorting an important criminal. They became used to the idea and would meaningfully say to one another, "he" or "it".

In this way, they proceeded deep into the territory of the Russian Empire along the same straight and much-trodden Vladimir highway.

And the empty space patiently walking between them kept changing; now it was the wind, now dust, now the enervate heat of late summer.

13

Meanwhile, an important order was overtaking them on the same Vladimir highway, from outpost to outpost, from fort to fort.

Yuri Alexandrovich Neledinsky-Meletsky had said to wait; and he had been right.

For Pavel Petrovich's great fear was slowly but surely changing into self-pity and tenderness.

The Emperor turned his back on the animal-shaped garden shrubs and, after a stroll in the open, turned to Cameron's sense of elegance.

He had come down heavily on all his mother's governors and generals, he had hidden them on estates where they were simply whiling away their time. He had been forced to do this. And the result? A huge vacuum formed all round him.

He hung a box for complaints and letters in front of his castle because, after all, he and no one else was the Father of the Fatherland. At first the box stayed empty, and this annoyed him, because the fatherland should talk to its father.

Then an anonymous letter was found in the box calling him a snub-nosed old fool and threatening him.

Whereupon he studied himself in the mirror.

"Snub-nosed, gentlemen, snub-nosed, indeed," he said huskily, and had the box removed.

He left on a tour of that strange fatherland. He banished to Siberia a governor who dared to lay new bridges in his province for the emperor's journey. After all, it was not his mother's journey: everything had to be as it was, without prettification. But the fatherland was silent. Some muzhiks began gathering round him on the Volga. He sent a boy to scoop water from the middle of the river so that he could drink pure water.

He drank it, and said hoarsely to the muzhiks:

"See, I'm drinking your water. What are you gaping at?"

And suddenly there was nobody there.

He went travelling no more and instead of a box he posted burly sentries at each outpost, but did not know whether they were loyal or whom he ought to fear.

There was treachery and emptiness all round.

He hit on the secret of how to get rid of this and introduced precision and total subordination. The departments started working. He was considered only to be keeping the executive power for himself. But it somehow happened that the executive power muddled up all the departments, and the results were suspicions of treachery, emptiness, and cunning servility. To himself, he seemed like a chance swimmer raising empty hands amid the boisterous waves—he had once seen an engraving of such a scene.

Meanwhile, he was the only lawful autocrat after many long years.

He felt an urgent desire to rely on his father, even though dead. He exhumed from his grave the German simpleton who had been murdered with a fork and who was considered to be his father, and he put his grave beside that of the usurper of the throne. But this was done mainly to avenge himself on his dead mother, during whose lifetime he had lived as one condemned to execution at any moment.

Had she, in fact, been his mother?

He had a vague idea of the scandal attending his birth. He was a man with no family, deprived even of a dead father and a dead mother.

He never thought about all this and would have ordered any man who suspected him of such notions to be shot from a cannon.

But at such moments, he enjoyed even the little pranks and the Chinese houses of his Trianon. He remained a direct friend of nature and craved universal love, or, at any rate, someone's love.

He had sudden spells of this, and then rudeness was considered frankness, folly was seen as directness, cunning became good nature, and the Turkish batman who waxed his boots was made a count.

Yuri Alexandrovich had a fine nose for change.

He waited about a week until he felt it coming.

With quiet but cheerful steps he danced round the glass screen and suddenly told the Emperor, under cover of simplicity, all he knew about Second Lieutenant Snamely, except, of course, the detail of the flattened nose signal.

At this, the Emperor burst into such a fit of baying, dog-like, hoarse and convulsive laughter, that it was as if he were trying to frighten somebody.

Yuri Alexandrovich felt uneasy.

He wanted to do a favour for Nelidova, whose domestic friend he was, and incidentally to show his importance, for, in the words of the German proverb current at the time—only death goes unrewarded. But such laughter could at once force Yuri Alexandrovich to play second fiddle or even serve as the instrument of his own extermination.

Was this sarcasm, perhaps?

But no, the Emperor was exhausted with laughter. He stretched out his hand for the quill, and Yuri Alexandrovich, standing on tiptoe, followed what the Emperor was writing:

Second Lieutenant Snamely, banished to Siberia, is to be brought back, promoted to Lieutenant and married to the lady-in-waiting.

Having so written, the Emperor walked up and down the room as one inspired.

He clapped his hands, struck up his favourite song and began whistling:

*Fir grove, my fir grove,
My thick little birch grove...*

while Yuri Alexandrovich in a thin and very quiet voice took up the refrain:

Lyushenki lyuli.

14

A bitten dog likes to go into the fields and heal itself there with bitter herbs.

Lieutenant Sinyukhaev was proceeding on foot from St. Petersburg to Gatchina. He was on the way to see his father, not to ask for help, but simply to ascertain whether a father of his existed in Gatchina or, perhaps, did not exist. He made no reply to his father's greeting, looked round him and was already anxious to leave, like a man who is embarrassed or is even dissembling.

But the doctor, noticing that certain articles of clothing were missing, sat him down and began questioning him:

"Have you lost at cards or got yourself into a scrape?"

"I'm not alive," said the lieutenant suddenly.

The doctor felt his pulse, said something about leeches and went on questioning his son.

When he learned about his son's predicament, he was upset. He spent a whole hour writing and copying out an application, made his son sign it and went to Baron Arakcheyev on the next day in order to hand it in with the twenty-four hour report. He was too embarrassed, however, to keep his son at home, but sent him to the hospital and wrote on the board over his bed

<i>Mors occasionalis</i> Accidental death
--

15

Baron Arakcheyev was concerned about the idea of the state.

His character, consequently, was not easy to define: he was evasive. The Baron was not vindictive, he was sometimes even condescending. During the telling of a sad story, he would weep like a child and would give a kopek to the garden

girl as he walked round the garden. Then, having noticed that the garden paths were badly swept, he would order the girl to be birched. But after the punishment was over, he would give her a five-kopek piece.

In the Emperor's presence, he felt a weakness akin to love.

He worshipped cleanliness; it was the symbol of his nature. But it used to give him satisfaction only when he found faults in the cleanliness and order, and if there weren't any, he was secretly disappointed. He always ate salt-pork instead of fresh hot food.

He was as absent-minded as a philosopher. And, it's true, learned Germans found a resemblance between his eyes and those of the philosopher Kant, well-known in Germany at that time: they were of a liquid, indeterminate colour and veiled with a transparent pall. But the Baron took offence if anyone mentioned this resemblance.

He was not only parsimonious, he loved to make a splash and present everything in its best light. For this purpose, he used to go into the minutest details. He would browse over plans for chapels, Orders, icons and a dining table. He had a passion for circles, ellipses and lines which, interweaving like the strands in a three-tailed lash, made a pattern that could deceive the eye. And he loved to deceive the visitor, or deceive the Emperor and pretend that he did not notice when someone contrived to deceive him. To deceive him was, of course, difficult.

He had a detailed inventory of the things belonging to each of his servants, beginning with the valet and ending with the boy cook, and he checked all the hospital lists.

When organising the hospital in which Sinyukhaev's father served, the Baron himself showed how to set up the beds, where to put the benches, where the orderly's table should be and even what the quill ought to be like—that is, neat, without “whiskers”, in the form of a Roman *calamus*, or reed. The assistant doctor could get five lashes for a badly sharpened quill.

Baron Arakcheyev was concerned about the idea of the Roman state.

He therefore listened absent-mindedly to Doctor Sinyukhaev when he submitted his application, read it carefully and reprimanded the doctor because the paper had been signed with an uneven hand.

The doctor apologised, explaining that his son's hand had been shaking.

"Aha, my friend, you see, now," replied the Baron with pleasure, "and so his hand was shaking."

Then, with a look at the doctor, he asked him:

"When did death occur?"

"June the fifteenth," replied the other, slightly put out.

"June the fifteenth," drawled the Baron, thinking it over. "June the fifteenth.... And it's now the seventeenth," he said suddenly, looking straight at the doctor. "Where has the corpse been these last two days?"

Grinning at the doctor's expression, he glanced sourly at the application and said:

"Things have certainly gone wrong! Goodbye, my friend, off you go."

16

Singer and state-secretary Meletsky always acted with daring: he took a chance and often won because he presented everything in agreeable light, like Cameron's colours; but the wins alternated with losses, as in a game of quadrille.

Baron Arakcheyev was a man of a different kidney. He did not take risks and never gambled on anything. On the contrary, in his reports to the Emperor, he would point out a malpractice—that's it!—and immediately ask for instructions on how to eliminate it. The diminution that Meletsky risked was brought on the Baron by himself. Even so, a win had been glimpsed in the distance, as in a game of faro.

He drily reported to the Emperor that the deceased Lieutenant Sinyukhaev had turned up in Gatchina, where he had been committed to hospital. Moreover, he had declared himself alive and had made an application for his name to be re-entered on the rolls. Which application the Baron hereby tendered, and wished to know what the next instructions were. He wanted to show submissiveness with this paper, like a zealous bailiff who consults his employer about every little detail.

The reply came quickly—both to the application in general and to Baron Arakcheyev in particular.

A resolution was appended to it:

The application of the late Lieutenant Sinyukhaev, removed from the rolls owing to his demise, to be refused for that reason.

And a note was sent to Baron Arakcheyev:

My dear Baron Arakcheyev,

I am surprised that, while holding the rank of general, you do not know the Regulations, sending direct to me the application of the deceased Lieutenant Sinyukhaev who is not in your regiment what is more; it should have initially been sent to the offices of the regiment in which the lieutenant served, without myself being directly burdened with such an application.

Still, I remain well-disposed to you,

Pavel

What he did not say this time was: "Ever well-disposed to you."

Arakcheyev wept, since he disliked reprimands. He went to the hospital in person and ordered the deceased lieutenant to be removed forthwith after having been issued with underwear; but his officers' clothes, as registered in the inventory, were to be requisitioned.

17

When Lieutenant Snamely returned from Siberia, he was already famous. This was the lieutenant who had shouted "Guard!" under the Emperor's windows, had been flogged, banished to Siberia, then pardoned and promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Such were the salient features of his life.

The commanding officer no longer felt embarrassed by him and simply assigned him to the guard or to duties. When the regiment marched out of camp for manoeuvres, the lieutenant marched with it. He was an exemplary officer because it was impossible to find fault with him.

The lady-in-waiting, whose brief swoon had saved him, was overjoyed at first, thinking that she was to be reunited with her short-term lover. She put a patch on her cheek and pulled hard on her corset laces when they would not meet. Then in church she noticed that she was standing on her own and the adjutant was holding the crown over the empty space beside her. She wanted to fall into another swoon, but since she was looking down and could see her own waist, she thought better of it. Many people liked the mystery of a ceremony from which the bridegroom was absent.

After some time, a son was born to Lieutenant Snamely and rumour had it that the baby was the spitting image of its father.

The Emperor had forgotten about him. He was very busy.

The fast Nelidova was retired, to be replaced by the podgy Garina. Cameron, the Swiss chalets and even the whole of Pavlovskoye were forgotten. Sturdy, soldierly St. Petersburg lay in its neat brick orderliness. Suvorov, whom the Emperor disliked but tolerated because he had been at odds with the deceased Potemkin, was disturbed in his country solitude. A campaign was in the offing, since the Emperor had plans. There were many of these plans, and one frequently trod on the heels of the other. Pavel Petrovich had spread out and become squat. His complexion was now brick-red. Suvorov fell into disfavour again. The Emperor laughed less and less frequently.

Going over the regimental rolls, he happened upon Lieutenant Snamely and promoted him to captain, then, later, to colonel. Snamely was a model officer. Then the Emperor forgot about him again.

The life of Colonel Snamely passed by without attracting any attention, and all became reconciled to this. He had his own study at home, his own room in the barracks, and messengers sometimes came in with reports and orders, not showing too much surprise at the colonel's absence.

He was now in command of a regiment.

The lady-in-waiting felt best of all in the enormous double bed. Her husband was advancing in the service, she could sleep in comfort, and her son was growing up. Sometimes, the colonel's conjugal place in bed was warmed by some lieutenant, captain or civilian. So it was, incidentally, in the beds of many St. Petersburg colonels whose owners were away on campaign.

Once, when the exhausted lover was asleep, she heard a creak in the neighbouring room. The creak recurred. It was undoubtedly the floor drying. But she instantly nudged the sleeping man, hustled him out and threw his clothes through the door. Then she pulled herself together and laughed.

But this, too, happened in the home of many a colonel.

The muzhiks smelt of wind and their women of smoke.

Lieutenant Sinyukhaev did not look anyone in the face and distinguished people by their smell.

By smell he would chose a place for the night's rest, preferring to sleep under a tree where it's drier when it rains.

He kept moving, but never stayed anywhere.

He went through Finnish villages like a flat stone skimmed by a little boy over the surface of a river. Very occasionally, a Finnish woman would give him some milk. He would drink it standing up and proceed further. The little children fell silent, the shiny snot running from their noses. The village would close up behind him.

His gait changed little. It became looser with constant walking, but this loose-jointed, relaxed and even almost toy-like walk was still military, was still that of an officer.

He did not know which direction he was taking. But the directions he took could be defined. Performing zigzags like lightning on paintings of the Flood, he was going round in circles, and these circles were slowly shrinking inwards.

A year went by in this way until the circle became a point and he entered St. Petersburg and walked across it from end to end.

Then he began touring the city, and he would spend weeks going round and round in the same circle.

He walked quickly, always with the same military, loose-jointed gait, in which his legs and arms seemed to be worked like those of a marionette.

The shopkeepers loathed him.

When he happened to be walking down the Gostiny Ryad, they shouted after him:

"Come yesterday!"

"Play backwards!"

They said of him that he had brought bad business, and to avert the evil eye, the bread women, by tacit consent, would each give him a small loaf.

The little urchins, who at all ages have a sharp eye for weak points, ran after him shouting:

"Puppet on a string!"

In St. Petersburg, the sentries at Pavel Petrovich's palace called:

"The Emperor sleeps!"

This cry was repeated by the halberdiers on the crossways.

"The Emperor sleeps!"

And from that shout, as from the wind, the shops closed down one after another, and the pedestrians disappeared into their houses.

This meant that it was evening.

On St. Isaac's Square, crowds of muzhiks in sackcloth, who had been driven to work from the villages, put out their fires and lay straight down on the ground, covering themselves with their rags.

The guards with the halberdiers, having shouted "The Emperor sleeps!", themselves fell asleep. The sentry on the St. Peter-and-Paul Fortress marched with clocklike precision. In one tavern on the outskirts a young habitué in a bast belt sat drinking the tsar's wine with a coachman.

"It'll soon be all up with the old snub-nosed fool," the coachman was saying. "I've driven some important people in my time...."

The castle drawbridge was raised, and Pavel Petrovich looked out of the window.

For the time being, he was safe on his island.

But there were whispers and glances in the palace which he understood, and the people he met on the street fell on their knees before his horse with a strange look on their faces. He had instituted this in the first place, but people were now throwing themselves into the dirt in a different way. They were falling too eagerly. The horse was high and he was swaying in the saddle. He was ruling too quickly. The castle was not properly protected and was too spacious. He would have to select a smaller room. Pavel Petrovich, however, could not do this—someone would notice immediately. "The whole business should be hidden in a snuff-box," thought the Emperor, taking snuff. He did not light the candle. He mustn't put them on the scent. He stood in the dark, in his underclothes. At the window he mentally ran over names, made changes, eliminated Bennigsen, introduced Olsufyev.

The list would not come right.

"I haven't got my own with me...."

"Arakcheyev's a fool," he said quietly.

"...*vague incertitude*¹ with which the man serves...."

¹ Empty uncertainty (Fr.).—Tr.

The sentry was hardly visible at the drawbridge.

"It's necessary," said Pavel Petrovich, as of habit.

He rapped his fingers on the snuff-box.

"It's necessary." He searched his memory, rapped his fingers, then suddenly stopped.

Everything necessary had already been done, and yet it still wasn't enough.

"It's necessary to lock up Alexander Pavlovich," he said quickly with a wave of the hand.

"It's necessary...."

What was necessary?

He lay down and quickly, as he did everything, he dived under the blanket.

He slept like a log.

At seven o'clock in the morning, he woke up with a start and remembered: it was necessary to admit to his confidence a simple and modest man who would be utterly devoted to him; all the others would have to be replaced.

And he went back to sleep.

20

In the morning, Pavel Petrovich was looking through the Orders. Colonel Snamely had unexpectedly been promoted to general. This was the colonel who did not beg for estates, did not curry favour, was not a braggart and was not a swank. He served without fuss and nonsense and never complained.

Pavel Petrovich asked for his personal dossier. He paused at the paper from which it became clear that, as a second lieutenant, the colonel had been exiled to Siberia for shouting "Guard!" under the Emperor's window. He vaguely remembered something about it and smiled. This had been to do with a love affair.

He could now certainly do with a man who would shout "Guard!" under the window in an emergency. He granted General Snamely an estate and one thousand souls.

That evening, General Snamely's name rose to prominence. He was being talked about.

Somebody had heard that the Emperor had told Count Pahlen, with a smile which had not been seen for a long time:

"He should not be burdened with the responsibilities of a division now. He is required for something very important."

No one, apart from Bennigsen, wanted to admit that he knew nothing about the general. Pahlen had knitted his brows.

Chief Gentleman of the Bedchamber Alexander Lvovich Naryshkin remembered the general.

"Why, yes, Colonel Snamely.... I remember. He was mixed up with Sandunova...."

"On manoeuvres near Krasnoye...."

"I seem to remember he's a relative of Fyodor Yakovlevich Olsufyev...."

"He's not a relative of Olsufyev's, Count. Colonel Snamely is from France. His father was beheaded by the rabble at Toulon."

21

Events developed rapidly. General Snamely was summoned to the Emperor. On that same day, the Emperor was informed that the general was dangerously ill.

He snorted with exasperation and tore one of Pahlen's buttons off when he brought the news.

"Commit him to hospital and cure him," he wheezed. "And if, good sir, he does not recover..."

The Emperor's personal valet drove to the hospital twice daily to enquire about the patient's health.

In the big ward behind firmly closed doors, the doctors bustled about, themselves trembling like patients. General Snamely died towards the evening of the third day.

Pavel Petrovich was not angry any more. He looked at everybody with misty eyes and withdrew to his chambers.

22

The funeral of General Snamely made an unforgettable impression on St. Petersburg, and certain memoir-writers recorded the details.

The regiment marched with furled banners. Thirty court carriages, empty and full, rocked behind. This was at the Emperor's wish. The Orders were borne on velvet cushions.

Behind the heavy black coffin walked the widow, leading a child by the hand.

She was weeping.

As the procession passed Pavel Petrovich's castle, he rode out slowly and alone on to the bridge to watch, and raised his unsheathed sword in salute.

"My best people are dying."

Then, letting the court carriages go past, he said in Latin as he watched them recede into the distance:

*"Sic transit gloria mundi."*¹

23

Thus General Snamely was buried after having accomplished everything possible in life. He had been through it all: youth and love affairs, punishment and exile, years of military service, a wife and family, the Emperor's unexpected favour and the envy of the Court.

His name was entered in the *St. Petersburg Necropolis* and certain historians have mentioned it in their writings.

There is no mention in the *St. Petersburg Necropolis*, however, of the deceased Lieutenant Sinyukhaev.

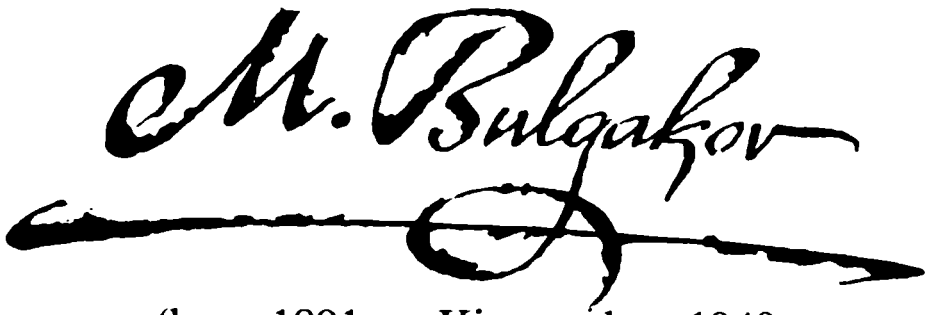
He vanished without a trace, crumbled into dust, into chaff, as if he had never existed.

In March of the same year as General Snamely, Pavel Petrovich himself died—of apoplexy, according to the official announcement.

1928

Translated by Alex Miller

¹ Oh, how swiftly the glory of the world passes away! (*Lat.*).—*Tr.*

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M. Bulgakov". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent flourish at the end.

(b. 1891, Kiev—d. 1940,
Moscow)

Mikhail Bulgakov died before he was 50 from an agonising disease of the kidneys. Being a physician he knew that his days were numbered, but even at the eleventh hour he went on making amendments and putting the finishing touches to his novel *THE MASTER AND MARGARITA*. He had worked on this novel—his major work—for thirteen years, and had fate granted him a longer span on earth he would have undoubtedly continued work on this, his most-loved book which brought out the best of his extraordinary talent.

After graduation from medical department of Kiev University, Bulgakov worked as a rural-board physician until 1919. From 1920 on he wrote. His first short stories were written in the manner of trenchantly satirical grotesques. His first novel *THE WHITE GUARDS* (1925) may have been written by a different person altogether: it is a calm, penetrating investigation of the baffling psychology of those who joined the white guard movement. And in 1928 he wrote his

FLIGHT in a different manner again: in this play, by using the techniques of a tragic grotesque, he describes the inner crisis of the white guards during their retreat and flight abroad. Both these works, also the play *THE DAY OF THE TURBINS* (based on the novel *THE WHITE GUARD*) hold a worthy place in Soviet literature dealing with the Civil War and analysing the historical and moral insolvency of the white guard movement.

While working as the dramaturge of the famous Moscow Art Theatre, Bulgakov wrote a biographical play about Molière in 1936 and about Pushkin in 1940. For him the novel *THE MASTER AND MARGARITA* (1928-1940) synthesised, as it were, all his artistic and moral seekings.

By alternating descriptions of everyday life, naturalistically mundane more often than not, with scenes, from the realm of the fantastic, by alternating satire with tender lyricism where he speaks of the Master and Margarita who are so infinitely dear to his heart, by using the techniques of allegorical writing, phantasmagoria at its most untrammelled, and the principles of mythological statement of fact, Bulgakov created a novel whose significance, needless to say, is not limited to the representation of fictitious happenings in Moscow at the end of the 1920s nor to the biblical events, veiled in the mist of time and legend.

The characters in this novel come from most diverse logical

categories, so to speak: there is Volland, who is also called Beelzebub, the eternal spirit of evil; with him are his accomplices and assistants from the netherworld and they move about among living people. These living people come from different ages and lands: Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea, Jeshua who preached a new religion and morality (the man who was given the name of Jesus Christ), and people living in the 20th century. The imaginativeness with which Bulgakov constructs the dazzling edifice of his novel literally sweeps the reader off his feet on the sharp turns from satire to psychological prose, from psychological prose to sheer phantasy. And although actually **THE MASTER AND MARGARITA** reads very easily, it is not a novel for cursory, light reading. The psychological analysis which Bulgakov makes of people's behaviour is so deep and so fascinating that it compels the reader to stop and think.

The existence of a master-writer like Mikhail Bulgakov is something Soviet culture can be proud of.

The Master and Margarita

(An excerpt)

EXTRICATING THE MASTER

In Volland's bedroom everything turned out to be the way it was before the ball. Volland, in his shirt, was sitting on the bed, but this time Gella was not massaging his leg: she was serving supper on the table where chess was played before. Koroviev and Azazello, their tail coats discarded, sat at the table, and beside them, of course, sat the Cat who had refused to take off his tie although it had become a hopelessly dirty rag. Margarita staggered to the table and stood leaning against it. Volland beckoned to her, as then, and motioned her to sit near him.

"Well now, was it too exhausting?" Volland asked.

"Oh no, Sire," Margarita replied in a barely audible murmur.

"Noblesse oblige," remarked the Cat, and poured some clear liquid into a Lafite glass for Margarita.

"Is it vodka?" Margarita asked faintly.

The Cat jumped on his chair from the insult.

"For heavens' sake, Queen," he croaked. "Would I permit myself to offer vodka to a lady? Why, this is pure spirits!"

Margarita smiled and made an attempt to push the glass away.

"Drink it up," Volland told her, and Margarita instantly picked up the glass. "Gella, sit down," he ordered, and explained to Margarita: "The night of the full moon is a holiday night, and I am supping in the intimate circle of my retinue and my servants. Now then, how are you feeling? How did that tiresome ball go?"

"It was terrific!" Koroviev burst forth. "Everyone was enchanted, infatuated, crushed, such tact, such competence, such appeal and charm!"

Gravely, Volland raised his glass and touched Margarita's with it. Margarita obediently drank up, certain that the raw spirits would kill her outright. But nothing frightening happened. A tingling warmth flowed down her stomach, something seemed to hit her softly on the back of her head,

and she felt her strength restored to her as if she had awakened from a long, refreshing sleep, besides which she also felt ravenous. Remembering that she had not eaten anything since the night before made her hungrier still. And she began to wolf the caviar.

Hippo cut a slice of pineapple, sprinkled it with salt and pepper, ate it and then tossed off another glass of spirits with such a dashing air that everyone clapped.

After Margarita had finished her second glass, the candles in the candelabra flared up and the fire in the grate burned the brighter. She did not feel drunk at all. Biting into the meat with her large white teeth she relished the juice running from it and at the same time watched Hippo smearing an oyster with mustard.

"Top it with a grape, why don't you?" Gella sneered in a low voice and nudged the Cat in the ribs.

"I'll thank you not to teach me," Hippo replied. "I've sat at dinner table before now, so don't you worry on my account."

"Ah, isn't it nice to sup like this at the fireside, so informally, in such an intimate circle..." quavered Koroviev.

"No, Bassoon," the Cat said. "A ball has its own charm and splendour."

"There's no charm in it whatsoever and no splendour either, and as for those silly bears in the bar, and tigers too, they almost made my head split from migraine with their roaring," said Volland.

"Right you are, Sire," agreed the Cat. "If you say there's no splendour, I shall immediately subscribe to the same opinion."

"Look at that!" said Volland.

"I was joking," the Cat said meekly. "As for the tigers, I'll have them roasted."

"One can't eat tigers," stated Gella.

"You think so? Then lend me your ears, please," retorted the Cat and, screwing up his eyes, related how once he had wandered for nineteen days in the wilds all by himself feeding solely on the flesh of the tiger he had killed. Everyone listened with interest to this amusing story and when Hippo had finished, they exclaimed in a chorus:

"What drivels!"

"And the most interesting thing about this drivels is that it's a fib from beginning to end," pronounced Volland.

"Is that so? A fib, you say?" the Cat cried, and everyone expected him to make an issue of it, but he only said quietly: "Let history be the judge."

"Tell me," Margot, enlivened by the spirits, turned to Azazello. "Did you shoot him, that former baron?"

"Naturally," replied Azazello. "How could I not shoot him? He definitely had to be shot."

"I was so alarmed!" Margarita cried. "It happened so unexpectedly."

"There was nothing unexpected about it," Azazello objected, while Koroviev whined and wailed:

"Anyone would be alarmed! I myself was shaking in my boots! Bang! And the baron was down!"

"I almost had a fit of hysterics," added the Cat, licking the caviar spoon.

"What I can't understand," Margarita said, and the golden sparks thrown off by the crystal danced in her eyes, "is how can it be that at first the music and the din made at this ball was not heard outside?"

"Of course not, Queen," explained Koroviev. "It was meant not to be heard. Such things have to be handled with care."

"Yes, of course, of course... Otherwise, you know, that man on the stairs... When we walked past with Azazello... And that other one at the front door... I think he was watching your flat..."

"Quite right, quite right!" shouted Koroviev. "You're quite right, dear Margarita Nikolayevna! You have confirmed my own suspicions. Yes, he was watching the flat. At first I almost took him for an absent-minded professor or a lover pining on the stairs, but no, no, he wasn't that! Something tugged at my heart! Oh my! He was watching the flat! And that one, at the front door, too! And the one in the gateway was doing the same!"

"I wonder, will they come to arrest you?" Margarita asked.

"They will most certainly, Queen, most certainly!" replied Koroviev. "I can feel it in my bones. Not this very minute, of course, but come they will in their own good time. But I imagine that nothing interesting will happen."

"Ah, I was so alarmed when that baron fell down," Margarita was saying, evidently still unable to get over the first murder she had seen in her life. "You must be a good shot, are you?"

"Not bad," replied Azazello.

"At how many paces?" Margarita asked somewhat incompetently.

"It depends on what I'm aiming at," Azazello replied reasonably. "It's one thing smashing the critic Latunsky's window with a hammer, and quite another hitting the same chap's heart."

"His heart!" Margarita gasped, clutching at her own heart. "His heart!" she repeated hollowly.

"Who is that critic Latunsky?" Volland asked, looking narrowly at Margarita.

Azazello, Koroviev and Hippo dropped their eyes shamefully, and Margarita, blushing, replied:

"There is a critic like that. I smashed up his flat this evening."

"Did you really! What for?"

"He wrecked the life of a certain master, Sire," Margarita told him.

"But why did you trouble to do it yourself?" Volland asked.

"Allow me, Sire," the Cat cried eagerly, jumping up.

"Sit down, for heavens' sake," Azazello said testily, rising to his feet. "I'll go there myself..."

"No!" cried Margarita. "No, I implore you, Sire, don't let him."

"As you wish, as you wish," Volland said and motioned Azazello to his chair.

"Now then, where were we, our precious Queen Margot?" Koroviev was saying. "Ah, yes, the heart. He," here he pointed a long finger at Azazello, "he can hit any heart he chooses, any one of the auricles or ventricles."

Margarita did not immediately understand, and when she did she cried in amazement:

"But they're covered up, aren't they?"

"That's the whole point, my dear," quavered Koroviev. "The whole point is that they're covered up. Anyone can hit an uncovered object."

He took a seven of spades from the drawer and asked Margarita to mark one of the pips with a fingernail. She marked the top left one, and then Gella hid the card under pillow and cried:

"Ready!"

Azazello, sitting with his back to the pillow, took a black

automatic pistol from the pocket of his dress trousers, placed the barrel on his shoulder and, without turning round, fired, giving Margarita a jolly start. The card was pulled out from under the wounded pillow. The pip marked by Margarita showed a hole.

"I'd hate to run up against you when you're carrying a pistol," Margarita said, glancing at Azazello coyly. She had a passion for people who were first-rate at doing something.

"My precious Queen," shrilled Koroviev, "I wouldn't advise anyone to run up against him, armed or not! I give you the word of a former choirmaster and choir leader that whoever came running up against him would be out of luck."

The Cat who had sat glumly through the shooting experiment suddenly declared:

"I challenge this shooting record."

Azazello growled something in reply, but the Cat insisted and demanded two revolvers instead of one. Azazello produced the second revolver from the rear pocket of his trousers and, twisting his mouth contemptuously, handed both to the braggart. Two pips were marked on the seven of spades now. The Cat took a long time getting ready with his back to the pillow. Margarita had stopped ears with her fingers and stared at the owl slumbering on the mantelshelf. The Cat fired simultaneously from both revolvers. Gella shrieked, the murdered owl tumbled down from the mantelshelf, and the shattered clock stopped. Gella, who had blood on one of her hands, gave a howl and grabbed the Cat by his fur, he grabbed her by the hair, and the two rolled about the floor in a clinch. A glass fell off the table and broke into smithereens.

"Pull that she-devil off me," wailed the Cat, fighting free of Gella who had straddled him. The two were pulled apart, Koroviev blew on Gella's wounded finger, and it was well again.

"I can't shoot with people putting me off with their talking," Hippo shouted as he tried to stick back in place the huge tuft of fur which Gella had torn out of his back.

"I bet he did it on purpose," Volland said, smiling at Margarita. "He's a decent shot."

Gella and the Cat made up, and sealed their reconciliation with a kiss. The card was taken out from under the pillow to make sure. All the pips were unscathed except for the one hit by Azazello.

"Can't be," insisted the Cat, holding up the card against the light of the candelabrum.

The gay supper went on. The candles in the candelabra were becoming guttered, and from the fireplace a dry, fragrant warmth spread through the room in waves. Her hunger appeased, Margarita felt blissfully content. She gazed at the blue smoke rings from Azazello's cigar drifting into the fireplace, and the Cat catching them on the tip of his sabre. It was late, she believed, but she did not feel like leaving. Judging by everything it was close on 6 a.m. In the pause that ensued she turned to Volland and said timidly:

"I suppose it's time I went ... it's late."

"Why, what's the hurry?" Volland asked politely but a bit dryly. The others kept silent, pretending that they were engrossed in the smoke rings.

"It's time," Margarita repeated, completely disconcerted by the general silence, and gazed about her as if looking for a cape or a coat. Suddenly her nudity embarrassed her. She rose from the table. Silently, Volland took his threadbare, grimy robe from the footboard of his bed, and Koroviev draped it round Margarita's shoulders.

"Thank you, Sire," Margarita murmured, and looked at Volland with a question in her eyes. In response, he smiled at her politely and indifferently. All at once a hopeless dejection threatened to engulf her heart. She felt cheated. Apparently, no one was going to offer her any reward for all she had done at the ball, and no one seemed anxious to make her stay. And yet it was perfectly clear to her that she had nowhere to go. Just the fleeting thought that she might have to return to the mansion provoked an outburst of despair in her heart. Should she ask him herself, as Azazello had so temptingly advised her in the Alexandrovsky Garden? "No, never," she told herself.

"Good-bye, Sire," she said aloud, thinking: "Anything to get out of here, and then I'll find my way to the river and drown myself."

"Sit down," Volland told her imperiously. Margarita blanched and did as she was told. "Perhaps there's something you'd like to say in parting?"

"No, nothing, Sire," Margarita replied proudly. "Only that if you still need me I'll be ready and willing to do anything you wish. I'm not a bit tired and I had a wonderful time at the

ball. If it went on longer I'd readily offer my knee for thousands of gallows-birds and murderers to kiss." She looked at Volland through the mist of tears rising to her eyes.

"Right! You're perfectly right!" Volland shouted in a frightening, resounding voice. "That's the way!"

"That's the way!" echoed his retinue.

"We have been putting you to the test," Volland continued. "Never ask for anything! Never, for anything, especially from those who are stronger than you. They themselves will give you everything. Sit down, proud woman!" Volland tore his heavy robe off Margarita's shoulders, and once again she found herself sitting beside him on the bed. "And so, Margot," Volland softened his voice. "What do you want for being my hostess today? What do you wish to have for attending the ball in the nude? What value do you put on your knee? What damages do you claim from my guests whom you have just titled gallows-birds? Speak up! You can speak frankly now, because it's I who made the offer."

Margarita's heart began to hammer, she drew a deep breath and started figuring.

"Come on, don't be shy," Volland said encouragingly. "Stir up your imagination, spur it on! Just being present at the murder of an out-and-out scoundrel like that baron is deserving of a reward, all the more so if the person concerned is a woman. Well then?"

Margarita's breath caught, she was on the point of speaking her cherished wish in words she had prepared in her heart, when suddenly she turned pale, opened her mouth and stared wide-eyed. "Freda! Freda! Freda!" An importunate, beseeching voice had shouted into her ears. "My name is Freda!" And, stumbling over the words, Margarita said:

"You mean I can ask you for one thing?"

"You can demand it, donna mia, demand it," Volland replied with an understanding smile. "You can demand one thing!"

Oh, how cleverly and clearly Volland had stressed the words "one thing", repeating Margarita's own words!

She sighed, and said:

"I want them to stop handing Freda the scarf with which she had strangled her child."

The Cat rolled his eyes skyward and sighed noisily, but

refrained from speaking, perhaps remembering the painful ear-tweaking given him at the ball.

"In view of the fact," Volland began with a little smile, "that it is quite out of the question, of course, that you might have taken a bribe from that fool Freda—it would be incompatible with your queenly dignity—I hardly know what to do. The only thing, I suppose, is for me to get a lot of rags to plug up all the chinks in my bedroom."

"What are you talking about, Sire?" Margarita asked, bewildered by the really incomprehensible things he was saying.

"I agree with you absolutely, Sire," the Cat put in. "Rags is the thing," and he irritably banged on the table with a paw.

"I am speaking of mercy," Volland elucidated his words, his fiery eyes fastened on Margarita. "Sometimes it steals quite unexpectedly and perfidiously into the tiniest chinks. That's what I meant about rags."

"Me too!" cried the Cat and, just to be on the safe side, leaned out of Margarita's reach and covered his pointed ears with paws smeared with pink cream.

"Get out!" Volland told him.

"I haven't had my coffee yet, so how can I go?" argued the Cat. "Can it be, Sire, that on holiday night the guests at the table are divided into two sorts? Some are quality, and others—to quote that sad miser of a barman, are second best?"

"Shut up," Volland snapped at him and, turning to Margarita, asked: "Everything seems to show that you are an exceptionally kind person. Are you? A highly moral person?"

"No," Margarita replied emphatically. "I know that one must speak only frankly with you, and so I'll tell you frankly: I am a flippant person. I interceded for Freda with you only because I was imprudent enough to give her hope. She is waiting. Sire, she trusts in my power. It will be terribly awkward for me if her hopes are deceived. I'll know no peace for the rest of my life. There's nothing for it, though! It happened that way, that's all."

"Ah, I can see that", said Volland.

"You mean you will do it?" Margarita asked in a small voice.

"Certainly not!" Volland replied. "The thing is, dear Queen Margot, that a slight mix-up has occurred here. Every

department has its own business to attend to. To be sure, we can do quite a lot, far more than some not very keen-sighted people imagine..."

"Oh yes, far more," the Cat burst out uncontrollably, obviously priding in the extent of these capabilities.

"Keep quiet, damn you," Volland told him, and faced Margarita once more: "There's simply no sense in my doing something that should be done by someone else, another department as I have said. And so, I am not going to do it, you'll have to do it yourself."

"Will it work if I do?"

Azazello gave Margarita an ironic cross-eyed squint, shook his red head slightly, and snorted.

"Go ahead, for mercy's sake," Volland muttered and, twirling the globe, peered at some point on it, obviously engaged in something else while speaking with Margarita.

"Come on, call Freda," Koroviev prompted her.

"Freda!" Margarita shouted in a piercing voice.

The door flew open and a tousled, wild-eyed woman, naked, but with not a trace of intoxication left in her, rushed into the room and stretched her hands out to Margarita.

"You have been pardoned," Margarita said regally. "You shall not have the scarf handed to you any more."

Freda screamed, collapsed face down on the floor and lay there spread-eagled before Margarita. Volland waved a hand, and Freda vanished.

"Thank you, and good-bye," said Margarita and rose to go.

"Oh well, Hippo," Volland said, "on this holiday night, let us not profit by the action of an unpractical person." He turned to Margarita, and asked: "What do you want for yourself? This doesn't count, I didn't do anything, you know."

The ensuing silence was broken by Koroviev who whispered in Margarita's ear:

"Most precious donna, do be more sensible this time! Fortune, you know, may give you the slip!"

"I want my lover, the Master, to be given back to me at once, this very instant," Margarita said, and a spasm contorted her features.

Thereupon a wind tore into the room so violently that the tiny tongues of fire on the candles lay flat, the heavy window curtain shifted, the window was sundered, and a full

moon—not a morning but a midnight moon—appeared in the infinite heights. From the window-sill a greenish square of light fell on the floor, and Ivanushka's nocturnal visitor, who called himself the Master, materialised in this light. He wore his hospital garb—robe, slippers, and the small black cap with which he never parted. A grimace twitched his unshaved face, he darted insanely terrified looks at the burning candles, while the stream of moonlight swirled about him.

Margarita knew him at once; with a moan, and a fluttering gesture of astonishment, she ran to him. She kissed him on the forehead, on the mouth, pressed her face to his bristly cheek, and let her long-controlled tears pour in copious streams. All she could utter was one word, and she repeated it senselessly over and over again:

“You ... you ... you!”

The Master gently pushed her away, and said hollowly:

“Don't cry, Margot, don't torture me. I am gravely ill.” Clutching the window-sill as if he were going to leap on to it and escape through the window, he bared his teeth, as he peered at those sitting in the room, and shouted: “I'm frightened, Margot! My hallucinations have started again!”

Sobs clogged her throat, and she whispered, choking over the words:

“No, no, no, don't be afraid of anything! I am with you! I am with you!”

Very deftly and unobtrusively, Koroviev slid a chair under him, and the Master lowered himself into it, and then Margarita fell on her knees, clung to the sick man's side, and was hushed. In her agitation she did not notice that she was no longer naked and now wore a black silk cape. The Master dropped his head and stared at the floor with sick, unhappy eyes.

“They've certainly had a good go at him,” Volland spoke in the silence, and gave an order to Koroviev: “I say, be a knight, give this man something to drink.”

“Come, drink it, drink it,” Margarita begged the Master in a trembling voice. “Are you afraid? No, no, you must believe me, they'll help you.”

The Master took the glass and drank up whatever was in it, but his hand shook, and the empty glass crashed at his feet.

“That's good luck,” Koroviev whispered to Margarita. “See, he's already coming to!”

And, indeed, the sick man's look was less wild and nervous now.

"But it is you, Margot, is it?" asked the moonbeam visitant.

"It is, don't doubt it," Margarita replied.

"More!" Volland ordered.

After the second glass, the Master's look became alive and intelligent.

"Now, that's different," Volland said, screwing up his eyes.

"We can talk now. Who are you?"

"Nobody now," replied the Master, and a wry smile twisted his lips.

"Where have you come from?"

"From the house of sorrow. I am insane," replied the visitant.

This statement was more than Margarita could bear, and she burst into tears again. And then, drying her eyes, she cried:

"What awful words! Awful words! He is a master, Sire, I'm telling you. Make him well, he's worth it."

"Do you know with whom you are speaking just now?" Volland asked the Master. "Do you know where you are?"

"I do," replied the Master. "That boy, Ivan Bezdomny, had the room next to mine in the lunatic asylum. He told me about you."

"To be sure, to be sure, I had the pleasure of meeting that young man at the Patriarch's Ponds," Volland said. "He almost drove me insane by trying to prove to me that I did not exist! But you do believe that this is really I, don't you?"

"I have to," answered the Master. "Though it would be much safer, of course, to regard you as a figment of my hallucinations. Oh, I'm sorry," he added, remembering his manners.

"Ah well, if it's safer," Volland conceded politely.

"No, no, come to your senses," Margarita was frightened and shook the Master's shoulder. "This is really he!"

The Cat had butt into this too.

"And I really resemble a hallucination. Take a look at my profile in the moonlight," as he spoke he got into the moonbeam and would have said more if he hadn't been asked to shut up. "All right, all right, I'll keep mum. I'll be a silent hallucination," and on this he fell silent.

"Tell me, why does Margarita call you a master?" Volland asked.

With a wry smile, the Master replied:

"It's a pardonable weakness. She has too high an opinion of the novel I have written."

"What is this novel about?"

"It's a novel about Pontius Pilate."

Volland's reaction was a roar of such thunderous laughter that the tiny tongues of fire on the candles swayed and jumped, and the glasses and crockery on the table rattled, but this laughter neither frightened nor surprised anyone. Hippo actually clapped for some reason.

"What did you say it was about? Who?" Volland asked, turning serious. "In this day and age? Stupendous! Couldn't you find some other subject? Here, let me have a look at it," and he held out his hand, palm up.

"I can't, I'm sorry to say," replied the Master. "Because I have burnt my manuscript in the stove."

"Pardon me, but I don't believe you," said Volland. "It can't be. Manuscripts don't burn." Turning to Hippo, he said: "Here, Hippo, give me that novel."

The Cat jumped down from the chair at once, and everyone saw that he had been sitting on a thick pile of manuscripts. With a bow, he handed the top one to Volland. Margarita trembled and shouted, on the point of tears again from excitement:

"It's here, the manuscript! It's here!"

Darting to Volland, she murmured in adulation:

"Omnipotent! Truly omnipotent!"

Volland took the manuscript in his hands, turned it over, laid it aside, and fixed a silent, unsmiling stare on the Master. Inexplicably, the latter lapsed into a state of dejection and fretfulness, rose from his chair, wrung his hands and, addressing the distant moon, muttered, shuddering:

"Even at night with the moon out there is no peace for me, why have I been disturbed! O gods, o gods..."

Margarita clutched at his hospital robe, pressed her face to it, and herself began to mutter in tears and anguish:

"O Lord, why doesn't the medicine help you, why?"

"Never mind, never mind, never mind," whispered Koroviev, dancing around the Master, "never mind... Have another little glass, and I'll keep you company."

The little glass winked, twinkling in the moonlight, and help it did. The Master was seated again in his chair, and his face took on a calm expression.

"Well, everything's clear now," Volland said, rapping the manuscript with a long finger.

"Perfectly clear," confirmed the Cat, forgetting his promise to be a silent hallucination. "The main line of this masterpiece is clear to me now all the way through. What do you say, Azazello?"

"What I say," Azazello, who had kept silent all this time, replied with a nasal sneer: "It would be a good thing to drown you."

"Have a heart, Azazello, and don't give ideas to my lord," the Cat said. "Believe me, I'd appear to you every night, cloaked in moonlight like this poor master here, and I'd nod to you and bid you come with me. How would you like that, o Azazello?"

"Come, Margarita, speak up, tell me what you want, all you want," Volland spoke again.

Margarita's eyes lit up, and she asked Volland entreatingly:

"May I whisper with him first?"

Volland nodded, and Margarita whispered something into the Master's ear.

"No, it's too late." His answer was audible to all. "I want nothing more in life. Only you, only to see you. But I'm telling you again—leave me. You'll come to ruin with me."

"No, I won't leave you," Margarita said, and again addressed Volland: "Please put us back again in the basement in that side street off Arbat, and let lamp burn again, and everything be as it was before."

The Master laughed and, hugging Margarita's head which had become dishevelled hours ago, said:

"Ah, don't listen to the poor woman, Sire. Someone else has long been living in that basement, and anyway things can never be exactly as before." He pressed his cheek to Margarita's head, put his arms round her and crooned: "Poor dear, poor dear..."

"They can't be, you say?" Volland asked. "Quite true. But we'll try. Azazello!"

Immediately, a bewildered and nearly demented citizen in his underwear but carrying a suitcase and wearing a cloth cap crashed on the floor from the ceiling. The man was shaking from fear and curtsyng.

"Are you Mogarych?" Azazello asked the man who had dropped from the blue.

"Aloysy Mogarych," he replied, trembling.

"Was it you who, after reading Latunsky's article about the novel of this man, wrote a complaint against him with the information that he kept illegal literature in his possession?" demanded Azazello.

The newly-arrived citizen turned blue in the face and dissolved in tears of repentance.

"Did you want to move into his rooms?" Azazello made his nasal twang as disarming as he could.

The hiss of an infuriated tigress sounded in the room and, howling: "The witch will show you! The witch will show you!" Margarita dug her nails into Mogarych's face.

A general confusion followed.

"What are you doing!" the Master cried in martyred tones. "Margot, don't disgrace yourself!"

"I object, this is no disgrace!" yelled the Cat.

It was Koroviev who pulled Margarita away.

"I've put in a bath," screeched Mogarych, his teeth chattering and blood trickling down his face, and frightened out of his wits he shrieked out things that made no sense at all:

"The white-washing alone ... the vitriol..."

"Well, it's fine that you've put in a bath," Azazello said approvingly. "He'll need to take baths." And suddenly shouted: "Out!"

Mogarych was turned upside down and swept out of the window of Volland's bedroom.

Staring in dismay, the Master whispered:

"This probably beats everything Ivan told me!" He looked about him, completely at a loss, and finally said to the Cat: "I beg your pardon ... but are you the cat who got into the tram?"

"I am," said the Cat, feeling flattered. "It's nice to be spoken to so politely, because cats are usually addressed too familiarly, although no cat has ever drunk from the loving cup with anyone."

"I have a sort of feeling that you're not quite a cat," the Master said hesitantly. And added timidly to Volland: "I'll be missed at the hospital anyway."

"Why, why should you be?" Koroviev said reassuringly and suddenly he was holding pages of something in his hands: "Is this case history yours?"

"Yes."

And Koroviev threw the pages into the fire.

"No papers, no person," he said with satisfaction. "And this, is this your house-register?"

"Yes," the Master faltered.

"Who is registered in it? Aloysy Mogarych?" Koroviev blew at the page of the book. "Puff, and he's gone, and he never was in it either, mind you. If it puzzles the owner, just tell him that he must have dreamed up this Aloysy. Mogarych, you'll say? What Mogarych? There never was any Mogarych." Thereupon, the book vanished from Koroviev's hands. "And now it's already back on the owner's desk."

"It's true what you said," the Master said, impressed by Koroviev's superb legerdemain. "No papers, no person. That's precisely why I don't exist, because I have no identification papers."

"I beg your pardon, but that, in fact, is a hallucination, for here they are," and Koroviev handed the Master his paper. After that, he rolled his eyes and whispered sweetly to Margarita: "And here is your property, Margarita Nikolayevna," as he gave her her note-book with the corners singed, a dried rose, a photograph, and her savings account book, handling it with especial care. "With the ten thousand which you have deposited all intact. We've no use for what belongs to others."

"My paws would sooner drop off than I'd touch someone else's things," the Cat exclaimed self-righteously, as he danced on the suitcase to squeeze in all the copies of the hapless novel.

"And here's your document too," Koroviev said to Margarita, and then, turning to Volland, reported deferentially: "All done, Sire."

"No, not all," Volland replied, tearing his eyes away from the globe. "What will you have me do with your retinue, donna mia? Personally, I don't need it."

And here, Natasha, still naked, came running into the room and, gesticulating emotionally, shouted to Margarita:

"Be happy, Margarita Nikolayevna!" She nodded in greeting to the Master and again addressed Margarita: "I knew all about your comings and goings."

"Domestics know everything," the Cat observed, raising a paw judiciously. "It's a mistake to think them blind."

"What do you want, Natasha?" Margarita asked. "Go back to the house."

"Oh, Margarita Nikolayevna, dearie," Natasha entreated, dropping on her knees. "Ask him," she swivelled her eyes at Volland, "ask him to let me remain a witch. I don't want to go back to the house. I won't marry the engineer or the technician! Monsieur Jacques proposed to me at the ball last night." Natasha unclenched her fist and showed Margarita some gold coins.

Margarita looked at Volland for answer. He nodded, and then Natasha flung herself on Margarita's neck, gave her a resounding kiss and, with a jubilant cry, flew out of the window.

In Natasha's place there now stood Nikolai Ivanovich. He had taken on his former human appearance, but was extremely glum and even peeved.

"That one I'll release with particular pleasure," Volland said, looking at Nikolai Ivanovich with distaste. "With singular pleasure, he's so *de trop* here."

"I shall thank you to give me a paper certifying where I spent last night," Nikolai Ivanovich spoke very emphatically, his self-confidence belied by the wild look he cast about him.

"What for?" the Cat demanded sternly.

"To present to the militia and my wife," Nikolai Ivanovich replied firmly.

"As a rule we don't issue certificates, but just as a favour we'll make an exception in your case," the Cat said, frowning.

And before Nikolai Ivanovich knew it, there was Gella in the nude sitting at the typewriter and clattering away to the Cat's dictation:

"To Whom It May Concern. This is to certify that the bearer of the present, Nikolai Ivanovich, spent last night at a ball given by Satan to which he was invited as a means of transportation... Gella, brackets. And inside the brackets put 'hog'. Signed Hippo."

"And the date?" squeaked Nikolai Ivanovich.

"We don't put dates, with a date on it a certificate becomes invalid," replied the Cat, signed the paper, found a rubber stamp somewhere, breathed on it as it is done, impressed the word "Paid" over his signature, and gave the paper to Nikolai Ivanovich. After this, Nikolai Ivanovich vanished without a

trace, and a new, unexpected person appeared in his place.

"And who can that be?" Volland asked squeamishly, shading his eyes with a hand.

Varenuvha hung his head, sighed and murmured:

"Let me go back. I can't be a vampire. That time, you know, Gella and I almost made an end of Rimsky. And I'm no blood-sucker. Let me go."

"What is this raving, anyway?" Volland puckered his face fastidiously. "Who is this Rimsky? What is he drivelling about?"

"Don't give a thought, Sire," said Azazello, and then spoke to Varenuvha: "You must not be rude on the phone. You must not tell lies on the phone. Clear enough? Promise not to do it again?"

Varenuvha felt giddy from relief, he beamed all over his face and mumbled himself not knowing what:

"Cross my ... I mean to say, your Maj... right now after lunch..." He pressed his hands to his chest and looked prayerfully at Azazello.

"All right. Home you go," said Azazello, and Varenuvha vanished into thin air.

"And now all of you go and leave me alone with them," Volland ordered, indicating the Master and Margarita to his retinue.

His order was obeyed instantly. Volland remained silent for some minutes, and then addressed the Master:

"So you want to go back to the Arbat basement? And who's going to write? What of your dreams, your inspiration?"

"I have no more dreams, and no inspiration either," replied the Master. "Nothing interests me except her," he placed his hand on Margarita's head again. "I have been broken, I'm bored, and I long for the basement."

"And what of your novel, of Pilate?"

"It has become hateful to me, that novel. I have suffered too much because of it."

"Don't speak like that, I entreat you," Margarita pleaded piteously. "Why must you torment me? You know that I put my whole life into that work of yours." Turning to Volland, she said: "Don't listen to him, Sire, he is too overwrought."

"But, after all, you have to describe something, haven't you?" said Volland. "If you've exhausted this governor you

might begin to describe, say, this Aloysy person, if no one else."

The Master smiled.

"That's something Lapshennikova wouldn't publish, and besides it's uninteresting."

"But what will you live on? You'll have to lead a beggarly life, you know."

"And I will very readily," the Master replied, drew Margarita close, put his arms about her and added: "She'll come to her senses and leave me..."

"Hardly," Volland said through set teeth, and continued in the tone he used before: "And so, the man who has devised the story of Pontius Pilate will retreat into his basement with the intention of mooning there beside his lamp and going hungry?"

Margarita drew away from the Master and spoke very hotly:

"I did everything I could, I whispered the most tantalising things into his ear. And even that he rejected."

"I know what you whispered to him," said Volland. "But it's not the most tantalising thing." And to the Master he said with a smile: "Your novel, I tell you, will bring you some surprises yet."

"That's very sad," said the Master.

"No, no, not sad at all," Volland said. "Nothing frightening will happen now. Well then, Margarita Nikolayevna, everything has been done. Have you any complaints?"

"Oh no, heavens no, Sire!"

"Good. Then accept this to remember me by," Volland took a small golden horseshoe, studded with diamonds, from under his pillow.

"No, no, why should you!"

"D'you want to quarrel with me?" Volland asked, smiling.

As there was no pocket in her cape, Margarita put the horseshoe in a napkin and knotted the ends. Something startled her just then. She looked at the window into which the moon shone brightly and said:

"There's something I don't understand... How can it be night all the time when it should have been morning hours ago?"

"If it's a holiday night it's nice to make it last a bit longer," Volland replied. "Well, I wish you happiness."

Margarita stretched both hands to Volland worshipfully, but did not dare come close to him, and exclaimed softly:

“Good-bye, good-bye!”

“Au revoir,” said Volland.

Margarita in the black cape and the Master in his hospital robe went out into the corridor of the jeweller widow’s flat where a candle was burning and Volland’s retinue were waiting for them. As they walked down the corridor Gella, helped by the Cat, carried the suitcase containing the novel and Margarita’s few possessions. At the door of his flat Koroviev bid them good-bye and vanished, while the others escorted them down the stairs. There was no one going up or down. When they were passing the third-floor landing there was a soft little thud, but no one took notice. Just inside the front door of entrance No. 6 Azazello blew upwards, and no sooner were they out in the yard into which the moon had not shone that night than they saw a man, in tall boots and a cloth cap, asleep on the porch, evidently dead to the world. And drawn up to the porch was a large black automobile with the headlamps dimmed. The silhouette of a rook showed vaguely in the windshield.

They were about to get into the car, when suddenly Margarita uttered a gasp of despair:

“O Lord, I’ve lost the horseshoe!”

“Get into the car,” Azazello told them, “and wait for me. I won’t be a minute, I’ll just see what it’s all about.” And he went back indoors.

What had happened was this: some time before the emergence of Margarita with the Master and their escort from flat 48, which was above the jeweller widow’s, a skinny little woman carrying a milk can and a shopping bag came out on to the stair landing. This was the very same Annushka who had on Wednesday spilled her sunflower-seed oil at the turnstile to Berlioz’s woe.

No one knew and would probably never know what this woman was doing in Moscow and what she lived on. All that was known about her was that she could be seen every day with her milk can or her bag, or else with both milk can and bag, at the kerosene shop, the market-place, at the house gates, on the stairs, but most frequently in the kitchen of flat 48 where this Annushka, in fact, lived. What was also known, and actually best known about her, was that wherever she

happened to be or wherever she appeared a row was certain to break out at once; and for yet another thing, that she was nicknamed "the Plague".

This Annushka the Plague was a very early riser for reasons unknown, and on this particular morning something got her out of bed at quite an ungodly hour, a little past midnight. The door-key clicked, Annushka poked her nose out, then poked out the rest of herself, slammed shut the door behind her, and was just starting down the stairs when a door banged on the floor above, something came rolling down the stairs, crashed into her and threw her so forcefully that she hit the back of her head against the wall.

"Where d'you think you're going in your underpants, is the devil on your heels or something?" screamed Annushka, clutching at the back of her head. The man in the underwear, yet carrying a suitcase and wearing a cloth cap, replied in a weird, sleepy voice with his eyes closed:

"The geyser! The vitriol! What the white-washing alone has cost," and bursting into tears suddenly barked: "Get out!" He made a rush but not on his way down the stairs, he rushed back upstairs to where a window pane had been kicked out by the economist and through this window he tumbled head over heels down into the yard. Annushka gasped, forgetting her sore head, and hurried to the window. She lay down on the landing and poked out her head, expecting to see the broken body of the man with the suitcase on the asphalt under the light of the street lamp. But there was absolutely nothing there on the asphalt beneath the window.

There was nothing for it but to assume that the strange and sleepy character had flown out of the house like a bird, leaving no trace behind him. Annushka crossed herself and thought: "That flat 50 is really something! People wouldn't talk for nothing! Some flat, that!"

No sooner did she finish this thought than the door upstairs banged again, and someone else came running down the stairs. Annushka flattened herself against the wall and saw a rather respectable-looking gentleman with a small, neat beard but a slightly porcine face, or so she fancied. He slipped past her and, like that first man, left the house through the window with as little intention of crashing to his death on the asphalt below. Forgetting where she was going, Annushka remained on the stairs, making the sign

of the cross again and again, sighing and talking to herself.

A third man, dressed in a belted blouse, beardless and with a round clean-shaven face, came running down a little later and also flitted out of the window.

It must be said to Annushka's credit that she was an inquisitive soul, and so she decided to wait and see if any more miracles would come to pass. Now the door upstairs was opened again and a whole crowd came trooping down the stairs, not running this time but walking as people usually do. Annushka disengaged herself from the window, hurried down one flight to her own landing, quickly opened her door, slipped inside and peered through the chink she left with one ecstatically curious eye.

A man who seemed ill, or at least if he wasn't ill he looked queer, with a pallid, unshaven face, wearing a small black cap and a sort of robe, came down the stairs on shaky legs. He was tenderly supported by a young lady dressed in something that in the semi-darkness looked like a priest's robe to Annushka. The young lady was either barefoot or wearing strangely transparent and obviously foreign-made slippers, torn to shreds. Slippers, indeed! Never mind the slippers! The young lady was stark naked! She had nothing on underneath the flapping robe! Some flat, that! The very thought of what she'd tell her neighbours come morning made Annushka's mouth water and her very heart sing.

Behind the strangely dressed young lady came a completely naked young lady carrying a suitcase, and there was a huge black cat weaving round this suitcase. Annushka almost let out a squeal, rubbing her eyes in disbelief.

The last in this procession was a short, limping foreigner with queer eyes, wearing evening dress, that is, the waistcoat and white tie but no coat. The party proceeded down the stairs past Annushka. She heard something drop on the landing with a gentle thud. When the sound of their footsteps receded far enough, Annushka slipped out of the door like a snake, set her milk can down against the wall, dropped on her belly and started groping round. Her fingers closed over a knotted napkin with something heavy inside. Her eyes fairly popped when she undid the small bundle. She peered hard at the precious horseshoe, and her eyes burnt with a truly wolfish fire. Her mind was in a whirl. "I don't know anything! First time I hear of it!... Shall I take it to my nephew? Or

maybe saw it up into pieces? The stones can be dug out, can't they... And sold one by one: one in Petrovka, another at the Smolensky market place... I don't know anything! First time I hear of it!"

Annushka hid the treasure inside her blouse, picked up the milk can and made for her door, deciding to put off her trip to town, when suddenly that chap with the starched shirt-front and no coat confronted her, materialising the devil alone knew from where.

"Hand over the horseshoe and the napkin," he said in a sinister whisper.

"What horseshoe, what napkin?" Annushka demanded, feigning surprise rather skillfully. "I don't know what napkin you are talking about. Are you drunk, or what?"

Saying nothing more, he gripped Annushka's throat with fingers that were as hard as the hand-rail in a bus, and as cold, and completely cut off any intake of air. The milk can fell from her limp hand. After keeping her thus choked for a little, the coatless foreigner removed his fingers from her throat. Annushka took a gulp of air, and smiled.

"Oh, you mean the horseshoe," she cried, "One minute, one tiny little minute! So it's your horseshoe, is it? It was lying here, wrapped in a napkin, and I said to myself that I'd better put it away, because if any one else should pick it up that's last you'd ever see of it!"

Once he had retrieved the horseshoe and the napkin, the foreigner began to bow and scrape before Annushka, he squeezed her hand again and again, and thanked her in the warmest terms with a pronounced foreign accent:

"I am profoundly grateful to you, madam. I cherish this little horseshoe as a precious memento. Allow me to present you with two hundred rubles for keeping it safe." He whisked out the money from his waistcoat pocket and handed it to Annushka.

"Ah, thank you kindly! Merci! Merci!" All Annushka could do was give these staccato shrieks, smiling frantically.

The generous foreigner took a whole flight of stairs down in one glide, but before he went for good he called out to Annushka without a trace of accent now:

"If you ever pick up something dropped by someone else, you old witch, hand it over to the militia and don't hide it inside your blouse!"

Her ears ringing and her mind in a turmoil from all these happenings on the stairs, Annushka went on shrieking mechanically long after the foreigner had gone: "Merci, merci, merci!"

The car was gone, too. After returning the horseshoe to Margarita, Azazello had asked her if she was comfortable, before saying good-bye, then Gella and Margarita had exchanged hearty kisses, the Cat touched Margarita's hand with his lips, all three waved to the Master who had slumped lifelessly into the corner, waved to the rook, and instantly dissolved in the air, saving themselves the trouble of trudging up the stairs. The rook switched on the headlights and the car rolled through the gates past the sleeping man who was still dead to the world. And then the lights of the large black car became lost among the other lights on the sleepless and noisy Sadovaya Street.

An hour later, Margarita sat weeping softly from her shattering experience and from sheer happiness at the table, covered with a plush cloth, with a small vase of lilies-of-the-valley on it and the lamp above it, in the basement of the small house in one of the side-streets off Arbat, in the front room where everything was exactly as it had been before that terrible night the autumn before. The singed note-book lay before her, and beside it towered a stack of unscathed note-books. The house was wrapped in silence. In the little room next door, the Master was sleeping soundly on the couch with his hospital robe draped over him. His even breathing was soundless.

When she had cried her fill, Margarita went through the unscathed note-books and found the passage she had been re-reading before her meeting with Azazello at the foot of the Kremlin wall. Margarita did not feel like going to bed. She sat stroking the manuscript as lovingly as one strokes one's beloved cat, she turned it this way and that in her hands, examining it, now pausing to look at the title page, now starting from the end. At moments a horrible thought overwhelmed her that all this was witchcraft, that the note-book would vanish, that she'd find herself in her bedroom in the mansion, and that, on awakening, she would have to go and drown herself. But this was the last horrible thought she had, an echo of her endless-seeming sufferings. Nothing vanished, the omnipotent Volland was really omni-

potent, and Margarita could rustle the pages all night, till morning if she wished, feasting her eyes on them, kissing them, and reading and re-reading the words:

“Darkness, coming from the Mediterranean Sea, descended on the city, a city hateful to the governor...”

Yes, darkness...

1928-1940

Translated by Olga Shartse

A. Platonov



(b. 1889, Voronezh—d. 1951,
Moscow)

Andrei Platonov's work became far more popular after his death than it was during his lifetime. The influence of his philosophy and style on contemporary Russian prose and poetry has been steadily increasing. The reason may be that he was, in a sense, ahead of the times in which he wrote and that the deeper significance of his work did not become obvious at once.

He began to earn his living as a fifteen-year-old, and acquired the skills of several manual trades. He took part in the Civil War. In 1927, he graduated from the Voronezh Polytechnical Institute and worked as an engineer. During the Second World War, he served as a front-line correspondent. As a man who lived courageously, he could appreciate courage in others and he was intolerant of any attempt to deprecate the ordinary working man. His ideals are usually embodied in people who are naive and sometimes slightly eccentric, but who are good in their job, think for themselves and stand

up for their dignity whatever the circumstances. Platonov portrays what is finest in man without resort to exaggeration, showing all the complex interpenetration of the new with the old. In the stories "The Intimate Man", "In the Lovely and Fierce World", etc., Platonov portrays his characters lyrically, but is not afraid to use grotesquerie or irony. When dealing with forces and characters hostile to life, good and truth (in "The City of Hails", "State Inhabitant", "Garbage Wind" and others), he is quite ruthless, using the techniques of satire or the broadside.

In Andrei Platonov's literary heritage (not yet published in its entirety) there are nine short novels, one full-length novel, over a hundred short stories and essays, four plays, six film scripts, dozens of critical articles and many retold fairy tales. His uncompromisingly democratic convictions and the originality of his harsh, yet inwardly refined, style will be making a greater artistic compact with the passage of years.

The Third Son

An old woman died in a small country town. Her husband, a seventy-year-old worker now on a pension, went to the post office and handed over six telegrams to different parts of the country, all with the same message: "Mother dead come home father."

The elderly post office assistant took a long time counting the money, making several mistakes, and wrote out and stamped the receipts with shaking hands. The old man looked at her meekly with his red eyes and vaguely thought about something, wanting to distract his heart from its grief. It seemed to him that the elderly woman had a broken heart, too, and a troubled soul that would never be quietened—perhaps she was a widow or a wrongfully deserted wife.

And now here she was, working slowly, miscounting the money and gradually losing the power to remember and pay attention; a person must have inner happiness even for the most ordinary, simple jobs.

After he had sent the telegrams the old father went back home; he sat down on a stool by the long table, at the cold feet of his dead wife, smoked, whispered sad words, watched the solitary grey bird hopping about on the perches in its cage, cried quietly to himself sometimes, then calmed down, wound his pocket watch and kept glancing at the window beyond which the weather kept changing in the world outside—sometimes the leaves fell mingled with flakes of wet, tired snow, then it rained, then the late sun shone, cold as a star—and the old man waited for his sons.

The eldest son arrived by aeroplane the very next day. The other five came over the next two days.

One of them, the third eldest, arrived with his daughter, a little girl of six who had never seen her grandfather before.

Their mother had been waiting on the table for four days now, but her body did not smell of death, so trim was it from her illness and dry exhaustion; after giving abundant, healthy life to her sons, the old woman had left herself with a small, skinny body which she had struggled hard to preserve, even in the most pitiful form, so she could love her children and be proud of them—until she died.

The huge men—aged from twenty to forty—ranged them-

selves silently around the coffin on the table. There were six of them. The seventh person was their father who was shorter than his youngest son and weaker too. In his arms he was holding his granddaughter, who screwed up her eyes in terror at the sight of the strange, dead old woman peering at her with white, unblinking eyes under her half-closed lids.

The sons shed their few restrained tears without a sound, twisting their faces so as to bear their grief in silence. Their father was not crying any more. He had wept his fill alone and was now glancing at his half-dozen powerful sons with concealed emotion and a delight that was quite out of place in the circumstances. Two of them were sailors—ship captains, another was on the stage in Moscow, the one with the daughter was a physicist and Communist Party member, while the youngest was studying to be an agronomist and the eldest was head engineer in an aeroplane factory and wore a medal on his chest for good work. All six of them and their father, the seventh, stood quietly around their dead mother and mourned her in silence, hiding from one another their despair, their memories of childhood and the lost happiness of love which had welled continuously and undemandingly in their mother's heart and had always found them, even across thousands of miles. They had felt it constantly, instinctively, and this awareness had given them added strength and courage to go about their lives. Now their mother had turned into a corpse. She could no longer love anyone and lay there like an indifferent old woman, a stranger.

Each of her sons now felt lonely and frightened. It was as if there had been a lamp burning on the windowsill of an old house somewhere in the dark plain, lighting up the night, the flying beetles, the blue grass and the swarms of midges, the whole world of childhood surrounding the old house abandoned by those born in it. The doors of the house were never locked, so that those who had gone away from it could return, but no one had come back. And now it was as if that light in the night window had suddenly gone out, and reality had turned into memories.

On her deathbed the old woman had asked her husband to have a priest perform a service over her while she was still lying at home, but to carry her out and bury her without the priest, so as not to offend her sons and so they could walk behind the coffin. This was not so much from a belief in God,

as from the desire that her husband, whom she had loved all her life, should grieve and sorrow for her all the more strongly with the sound of chanted prayers and the light of the wax candles above her lifeless face. She did not want to part from life without a flourish, without leaving some memories behind. After his children arrived the old man spent a long time looking for a priest and finally came home towards evening with another old man dressed in ordinary civilian clothes, pink-faced from his vegetarian lenten food, with lively eyes in which shone some small purposeful thoughts. The priest arrived with an army officer's bag slung over his hip in which he carried all his spiritual accessories: incense, thin candles, a book, a priest's stole and a small censer on a chain. He quickly placed the candles round the coffin, lit them, blew on the incense in the censer and at once, without any warning, began to read from the book in a low mutter. The sons who were in the room got to their feet, feeling awkward and somehow ashamed. They stood without moving one behind the other before the coffin, their eyes cast down. The elderly man chanted and muttered quickly, almost ironically, in front of them, his small, understanding eyes darting glances at the guard of the dead woman's kin. He half-feared and half-respected them, and clearly would not have minded starting up a conversation with them or even voicing his enthusiasm for the building of socialism. But the sons kept silent and nobody, not even the old husband, crossed himself—they were keeping a guard of honour by the coffin, not taking part in the religious service.

When he had finished the hasty service, the priest gathered up his things, blew out the candles burning round the coffin, and put all his bits and pieces back into the army bag. The father put some money into his hand and, without further delay, the priest slipped through the line of the six men, who did not raise their bowed heads, and went out closing the door fearfully behind him. He would really have liked to stay in the house for the funeral meal, chat about wars and revolutions, and draw comfort for a long time from this meeting with representatives of the new world which he secretly admired but could not enter. On his own he used to dream of performing some sort of heroic feat to break his way into the glorious future with the new generations—with this in mind he had even applied to the local aerodrome asking to be taken

up to the highest point in a plane and dropped by parachute without an oxygen mask, but they had not replied.

In the evening the father made up six beds in the other room and put his little granddaughter beside him in his own bed where the dead old woman had slept for forty years. This bed was in the same large room as the coffin, but the sons went off into the other room. The father stood by the door until his children had got undressed and into bed, then pulled the door to and went to bed next to his granddaughter after putting out all the lights. His granddaughter was already asleep, alone in the wide bed, her head under the blanket.

The old man stood over her for a while in the night dusk; the fresh snow on the ground outside gathered the scant, scattered light from the sky and lit the darkness in the room through the windows. The old man went up to the open coffin, kissed his wife's hands, forehead and lips and told her, "Rest now". He lay down carefully beside his granddaughter and closed his eyes to make his heart forget everything. He drowsed off and then woke up again suddenly. A light was showing under the door of the room where his sons were sleeping—the electric light had been turned on again and he could hear laughter and noisy conversation.

The little girl began to toss about because of the noise. Perhaps she was not asleep either, only afraid to pop her head out from the blanket, terrified of the night and the dead old woman.

The eldest son was talking about hollow metal propellers excitedly, with the delight born of conviction, and his voice sounded full and strong. He had fine, well-tended, healthy teeth, and a strong, red larynx. His sailor brothers were telling stories about foreign ports and laughing because their father had given them the old blankets they had slept under in childhood and adolescence. There were white strips of calico at the top and bottom with the words "head" and "feet" so you spread the blanket properly and did not have the dirty, sweaty end where your feet had been by your face. Then one of the sailors began to wrestle with the actor and they rolled around on the floor like they had when they were boys and all lived together. The youngest son egged them on, saying he would take them both on with nothing but one arm. It was obvious the brothers loved one another and were happy to be together again. Many years had passed since their last reunion

and who could say when the next one would be. Perhaps not before their father's funeral? While they were wrestling the two brothers knocked over a chair and there was a moment's hush, but then they evidently remembered that their mother was dead and could not hear anything, and went on with what they had been doing. Soon the eldest son asked the actor to sing something quietly: after all he must know all the good Moscow songs. But the actor said it was hard for him to start just like that, out of the blue. "All right, but put something over me first," he said. The hood saved him from the embarrassment of starting. While he was singing, the youngest son managed to do something that made his other brother fall out of bed onto a third who was lying on the floor. They all burst out laughing and ordered the youngest son to pick up the one who had fallen with his left arm and put him back to bed. The youngest son answered his brothers in a low voice and two of them roared with laughter so loudly that the little granddaughter popped her head over the blanket in the dark room and called out:

"Grandad! Hey, Grandad! Are you asleep?"

"No, I'm not. I'm alright," said the old man and coughed timidly.

The little girl suddenly let out a sob. The old man stroked her face: it was all wet.

"Why are you crying?" he whispered.

"I'm sorry for Grandma," she said. "Everyone else is alive and laughing, but she's dead."

The old man said nothing. He was sniffing and coughing. The little girl grew frightened and sat up to see if her grandfather was asleep.

She peered at his face and asked:

"Why are you crying too? I've stopped."

Her grandfather stroked her head and whispered back:

"I'm not crying, it's just sweat."

The little girl was sitting on the bed near the old man's pillow.

"Do you miss the old woman?" she said. "Don't cry. You're old and you'll die soon, then you won't cry any more."

"No, I won't," the old man answered softly.

Silence suddenly fell in the noisy room next door. One of the sons had said something before this. Then all of them

became quiet at once. A son said something else in a low voice. The old man recognised it as the voice of his third son, the physicist, the little girl's father. Up till then he had kept quiet, not saying anything or laughing. Now he had quietened down his brothers and they had even stopped talking.

Soon the door opened and the third son appeared fully dressed. He went up to his mother in the coffin and leaned over her blurred face which no longer held any feeling for anyone.

It was very quiet because of the late hour. There was no movement in the street outside. The five brothers did not stir in the other room. The old man and the little girl watched his son and her father, too engrossed to breathe.

The third son suddenly straightened up, stretched out a hand in the dark and reached for the edge of the coffin, but unable to hold on to it, he simply pushed it slightly to one side on the table and fell to the floor. His head hit the floor-boards, like some foreign object, but the son did not make a sound—only his daughter screamed.

The five brothers rushed out to him in their underclothes and carried him back to their room to bring him round and calm him down. When the third son regained consciousness a little while later, all the others had put on their uniforms or suits, although it was only one o'clock in the morning. One by one they slipped off to different parts of the house, into the yard and the night that surrounded the place where they had spent their childhood, and wept there whispering and whimpering as if their mother were standing over each of them listening and lamenting that she had died and made her children miss her; if she could, she would have stayed alive all the time, so that no one should be unhappy on her account, or waste the heart and body to which she had given birth. But she had not the strength to live longer.

In the morning the six sons raised the coffin on to their shoulders and carried it off to bury it. The old man picked up his granddaughter and followed them; by now he had got used to missing the old woman and was proud and content that he too would be buried by these six strong men, and just as finely.

I. Ilf, Ye. Petrov

(b. 1897, Odessa—d. 1937,
Moscow)

(b. 1903, Odessa—d. 1942,
Sevastopol)

Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov were both satirical writers and each was famous in his own right before they met each other. Real fame, however, came to them after they began to work as a team in 1926. Ilf and Petrov's first co-authored work was the novel THE TWELVE CHAIRS (1928). The main hero of this work is the "honest wheeler-dealer" Ostap Bender. In this novel he spends his time searching for the jewels hidden by a certain Madame Petukhova in one chair of a set of twelve scattered all over the country. The sharp wit and powers of observation of the authors together with their unsurpassed sense of humour led to this novel becoming extremely popular.

THE GOLDEN CALF, which sets out Ostap Bender's further adventures, was published in 1931. This is the story of another search: this time Ostap Bender and his helpers pursue the "underground millionaire"

Koreiko. Bender finally gets hold of the longed-for riches but paradoxically finds that the people of the new society already have different values and that he is an alien and alienated in his own country.

The authors of THE GOLDEN CALF were striving to show that next to and alongside the big world there live the people of a little world with their own miserable ideals. While in the big world the people are engaging in construction and car races are being held in order to emphasise the country's transition to industrialisation, the little world's inhabitants are engaging in underhand tricks and cheap imitations of the events in the big one—in order by means of mimicry to snatch something for themselves.

In 1936 Ilf and Petrov published their book ONE-STOREYED AMERICA which they wrote after a trip to the USA. In this work their intention was to write only about what they themselves had seen, to write about serious matters without for that avoiding humour. The book became popular in both the Soviet Union and the USA.

It was a lucky chance for our literature that these two talented and merry men should have met. Together, their skills were multiplied and it is much to be regretted that they should have died so young. Ilya Ilf died of tuberculosis in 1937. Yevgeni Petrov was killed in 1942 while coming out of the besieged city of Sevastopol.

The Golden Calf

(An excerpt)

THE SWEET BURDEN OF FAME

The captain, driver, mechanic, and the service maid all felt wonderful.

The morning was a cool one and a pale sun hung behind a pearly haze. Feathered riff-raff chirruped in the grass. Moorhens slowly crossed the road right in front of the car's wheels. The steppe gave off such exciting smells that had some middling peasant writer from the "Steel Udder" group been in Ostap's place, he would not have been able to restrain himself but would have jumped out of the car, sat down in the grass, and instantly begun to write a new novel in his notebook, beginning thus: "The winter crops were sweating. The sun opened up and scattered its rays about the world. Old Romualdych sniffed his foot-rags and nearly puked..."

But Ostap and his companions were far from having such poetic perceptions. They had been ahead of the race for a whole day now. They were met everywhere with music and speeches. Children hammered at drums for them. Adults fed them lunches and suppers, supplied them with specially stockpiled spare parts, and in one settlement they were brought bread and salt on a carved oak board with an embroidered cloth. The bread and salt offering now lay between Panikovsky's feet on the floor of the car. He kept pulling little bits off the loaf and in the end made quite a mousehole in it. After that, the fastidious Ostap threw the loaf out into the road. The Antelope's crew spent the night in a hamlet where they were cosseted by the local activists. The next morning they took away with them a large jug of scalded milk and sweet memories of the eau-de-cologne smell of the hay in which they had slept.

"Milk and hay," said Ostap when the Antelope left the village at dawn. "What could be better! You always think 'I'll still have time. There'll still be plenty of milk and hay in my life yet.' But in fact there never will be any more. So you know, my poor friends, that was the best night in our lives! And you didn't even notice."

Bender's companions looked at him with respect. They were delighted by the easy life that had opened up before them.

"It's good to be alive!" Balaganov exclaimed. "Here we are, driving, and with our stomachs full. Perhaps good fortune awaits us..."

"Are you quite sure of that?" Ostap asked. "That good fortune awaits us on this road? Perhaps you think she'll wave her little wings impatiently at us? 'Where,' she's saying, 'oh, where is Admiral Balaganov? Why is he taking so long?' Have you got a screw loose, Balaganov? Good fortune never waits for anyone. She wanders about the country in long white gowns, singing that children's song: 'Ah, America, that's the country where they all have fun and drink with never a care.' But one has to catch that naive child. One has to appeal to her, one has to court her. You, Balaganov, will never have a love affair with her. You're a bum. Just take a look at yourself! A man in a suit like yours will never find happiness. In fact, the whole crew of the Antelope is revoltingly badly rigged out. I'm amazed they still take us for competitors in the car race!"

Ostap sadly surveyed his companions.

"Panikovsky's hat really embarrasses me. All in all, he's dressed provocatively grandly. That precious tooth, those tapes on his long-johns, that hairy chest under the tie... You should dress more simply, Panikovsky! You're a respectable old man. You need a black frock-coat and beaver-skin hat. A cowboy's check shirt and leather leggings would suit Balaganov. It would make him look instantly like a student keen on sport. At the moment he looks like a merchant seaman discharged for drunkenness. I won't talk about our dear driver. The trials and tribulations sent by fate have prevented him from dressing as befits his position. Can't you see how good his inspired and slightly oil-smeared face would look over leather overalls and a black box-calf cap? Yes, my children, you do need rigging out."

"No money," Kozlevich said, turning round.

"The driver's right," Ostap replied amiably. "We haven't any money. None of those little round metal discs which I like so much."

The Antelope-Gnu skidded over a bump. The fields continued to unwind slowly past both sides of the car. A large

red owl with its head on side and stupidly bulging yellow unseeing eyes was sitting by the roadside. Scared by the Antelope's creaking, the bird spread its wings, flew over the car, and soon disappeared about its boring owlish business. Nothing else worthy of attention took place on the road.

"Look!" Balaganov suddenly yelled out. "A car!"

Ostap ordered the crew to take down, just in case, the banner calling on all citizens to support the car race as a blow against slovenliness. While Panikovsky was carrying out the order, the Antelope pulled closer to the other car.

The grey Cadillac was parked by the road, leaning slightly to one side. The countryside of central Russia reflected in the thick polished glass of its windows looked cleaner and more beautiful than it did in reality: Its kneeling chauffeur was changing a front wheel. Three figures in sand-coloured motoring coats hung impatiently over him.

"In trouble?" Ostap inquired, politely touching his forelock.

The chauffeur raised his tense face and, without replying, went back to his work.

The crew of the Antelope clambered out of their green boneshaker. Kozlevich walked round the superb car several times, sighing enviously, then squatted down beside the chauffeur and was soon talking shop with him. Panikovsky and Balaganov were examining the passengers with childish curiosity. Two of these had very haughty, foreign looks. The third, judging from the shocking smell of galoshes given off by his rubberised raincoat, was a fellow-countryman.

"In trouble?" Ostap repeated, placing a delicate hand on his fellow-countryman's rubber shoulder while at the same time staring thoughtfully at the foreigners.

The fellow-countryman began mumbling angrily about a burst tyre but this all flew right past Ostap's ears. On the open road, one hundred and thirty kilometres from anywhere, in the very heart of European Russia, two fat little foreign chickens were stretching their legs by their car. This excited the wheeler-dealer.

"Tell me," he interrupted, "are these two from Rio de Janeiro?"

"No," replied the fellow-countryman, "they're from Chicago. And I'm an Intourist interpreter."

"What are they doing here at a crossroads amidst wild, ancient fields, far from Moscow, from the ballet *The Red*

Poppy, from the curio shops, and from Repin's famous painting *Ivan the Terrible Killing His Son*? I don't understand. Why have you brought them here?"

"I wish they'd go to hell!" said the interpreter bitterly. "This is the third day that we've been running about the villages as if the devil were at our heels. They've worn me to a frazzle. I've had plenty to do with foreigners, but I've never seen any like these before." He waved a hand in the direction of his two rubicund travellers. "Most tourists usually dash about Moscow buying wooden cups and spoons from the handicraft shops. But these two have got it wrong. They want to go around the villages."

"That's laudable," said Ostap. "The broad masses of millionaires are acquainting themselves with the life of the new, Soviet villages."

The Chicago people watched the mending of the car with an air of importance. They wore silvery hats, collars iced with starch, and dull red shoes.

The interpreter cast an angry look at Ostap.

"Oh yes!" he exclaimed. "They don't care a hoot about the new villages! What they want is country moonshine and not country air!"

At the word "moonshine", which the interpreter had pronounced emphatically, the gentlemen stirred and walked towards them.

"You see!" said the interpreter. "They can't hear that word without getting excited."

"Yes, there must be a mystery here," Ostap said, "or else it's a matter of perverted tastes. I don't understand how one can like moonshine vodka when there is a large choice of noble liquors to be had in our country."

"It's all a lot simpler than you think," said the interpreter. "They're looking for a recipe for good moonshine."

"Yes, of course!" Ostap exclaimed. "They've got prohibition out there. Now I understand... Have you found a recipe?... Ah, you haven't? But of course. You should have come in three cars! They naturally think that you are the law. You'll never get a recipe, that I can guarantee."

The interpreter began complaining about the foreigners.

"Would you believe it, they pestered me: tell us, come on, tell us the secret of moonshine. But I don't brew moonshine."

I'm a member of the education workers' union and I have an old mother in Moscow."

"And do you very much want to return to Moscow? To your mother?"

The interpreter sighed pitifully.

"In that case the hearing is continued," Bender said. "How much will your bosses pay for the recipe? A hundred and fifty, say?"

"They'll even pay two hundred," the interpreter whispered. "Do you really know a recipe?"

"I'll dictate it to you this instant, or rather, as soon as I've got my money. What type of moonshine would they like: potato, wheat, apricot, barley, mulberry, or buckwheat? You can even distil moonshine from an ordinary kitchen stool. Some people like stool moonshine. Or you can have simple raisin or plum moonshine. In a word—any one of the one hundred and fifty recipes I know for moonshine."

Ostap was introduced to the Americans. Politely raised hats swam in the air for a long time. Then they got down to business.

The Americans chose wheat moonshine, attracted by the simplicity of the recipe. They spent a long time writing it down in their notebooks. As a free bonus, Ostap gave the American travellers a description of a superb type of indoor still that was easy to hide from the gaze of strangers in the drawers of a desk. The travellers assured Ostap that American technology would have no difficulty manufacturing such a still. Ostap, for his part, assured the Americans that a still of his design produced a bucketful of wonderfully aromatic "pervatsch" a day.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Americans.

They had already heard the word from a respectable Chicagoan family. They had heard excellent reports on "pervatsch" there. The head of that family had previously been with the American occupation force in Archangel, where he had drunk "pervatsch", since when he had been unable to forget the enchanting sensation he had felt in so doing.

The rough word "pervatsch" sounded delicate and enticing in the mouths of the satisfied tourists.

The Americans easily parted with two hundred roubles and shook Bender's hand for a long time. Panikovsky and Balaganov also had the opportunity of shaking hands with the

citizens of the transatlantic republic suffering under prohibition. The delighted interpreter planted a kiss on Ostap's firm cheek and told him to drop in at any time, adding that his old mother would be very pleased. For some reason, though, he did not mention his address.

It was as friends that the travellers took their seats in their respective cars. Kozlevich hooted in farewell and the cars shot off in opposite directions to that merry sound.

"You see," said Ostap when the American car had disappeared in a cloud of dust, "everything happened as I said it would. We were driving. There was money lying by the road. I collected it. Look, not even dusty."

He shook the pile of notes.

"Nothing to boast about, really. It was a simple trick. But neatness and honesty are what matter. Two hundred roubles. In five minutes. And not only did I not break any laws, I actually did a good deed. I've satisfied the monetary needs of the Antelope's crew. I've returned the interpreter-son to his old mother. And, finally, I've quenched the spiritual thirst of the citizens of a country with which, say what you like, we do have trade relations."

Lunchtime was coming up. Ostap pored over the map of the race he had torn out of a motoring magazine and announced that they would soon be reaching the town of Luchansk.

"A very small town," Bender said, "and that's bad. The smaller the town, the longer the welcoming speeches. That is why we shall ask our kind hosts for lunch first and speeches for afters. In the interval, I will supply your material needs. Panikovsky! You are beginning to forget your duties. Restore the banner to its previous position."

Kozlevich, now very familiar with triumphant finishes, brought the car to a smart stop right in front of the platform. Bender in this town limited himself to a brief greeting. It was agreed to postpone the meeting for two hours. Having fortified themselves with a free lunch, the racers set off in the finest of moods for the ready-to-wear clothes shop. They were surrounded by curious onlookers. The crew of the Antelope bore the sweet burden of fame that had fallen upon them in a dignified manner. They walked down the middle of the street, hand in hand, swaying like sailors in a foreign port. The ginger Balaganov, who truly did look like a young bosun, began a sea shanty.

The *Men's, Women's and Children's Clothes* shop was housed under an enormous sign that took up the whole front of a two-storey house. Dozens of figures had been painted on this sign: yellow-faced men with fine moustaches, in coats held open to display their polecat linings, ladies with muffs in their hands, short-legged children in sailor suits, Komsomol girls in red kerchiefs, and gloomy managers in felt boots reaching almost to their hips.

All this grandeur was ruined by a small notice stuck to the entrance of the shop:

No Pants

"Fooh, how vulgar," said Ostap as he went in. "You can tell at once we're in the provinces. They might at least have written 'No Trousers' as they do in Moscow. That's correct and noble-sounding. Citizens can go home happy after reading that."

The motorists did not spend long in the shop. A cowboy shirt in a large yellow check and a Stetson with holes in it were found for Balaganov. Kozlevich was obliged to make do with the black box-calf cap he had been promised and a short black coat of the same material that shone like pressed caviar. They took a lot of trouble over Panikovsky. The idea of the long clergyman's coat and soft hat which, as Bender saw it, would ennoble the appearance of the violator of the convention, had to be dismissed at once. The shop could only offer a fireman's uniform—a jacket with golden pumps on the collar tabs, hairy wool-mixture trousers, and a peaked cap with a blue band round it. Panikovsky spent a long time prancing about in front of the wavy mirror.

"I don't understand," said Ostap, "why you don't like the fireman's uniform. It's still better than the suit you were wearing. It made you look like a deposed king. All right, about turn, my son! Excellent! I'm telling you frankly. It looks even better on you than the coat and hat I had intended for you."

They went out into the street in their new clothes.

"I needed a dinner jacket," said Ostap, "but they didn't have one here. We'll wait for better times."

Ostap opened the meeting in an elated mood, not suspecting the storm about to break over the heads of the passengers of

the Antelope. He made witty remarks and told funny stories about their adventures on the road and Jewish jokes which earned him the extreme favour of the public. He devoted the end of his speech to a discussion of the long-overdue transportation problem.

"The motor car," he trumpeted, "is not a luxury but a..."

At that moment he saw how the chairman of the welcoming committee was taking a telegram from the hands of a boy who had come running up.

Completing his sentence with the words "not a luxury but a means of transportation", Ostap leaned to his left and glanced at the telegram over the chairman's shoulder. What he read all but paralysed him. He had thought they still had a day to spare. His mind immediately flipped through the villages and towns where the Antelope had made use of money and supplies intended for others.

The chairman was still wiggling his moustache, trying to understand what the message meant, when Ostap, having jumped from the platform in midword, was forcing himself a passage through the crowd. The Antelope shone green at the crossroads. Luckily all the passengers were in their seats and waiting boredly for when Ostap would give them orders to bring the town's gifts to the car. This was what usually happened after the meetings.

The meaning of the telegram at last got through to the chairman.

He looked up and saw the fleeing captain.

"They're crooks!" he yelled in pained tones.

He had stayed up all night working on his welcoming address and his author's pride was now wounded.

"Catch them, lads!"

The chairman's shout reached the ears of the Antelopeans. They made nervous haste. Kozlevich cranked the engine and lept right into his seat. The car plunged forward without waiting for Ostap. In their hurry, the Antelopeans did not even realise that they were leaving their captain in danger.

"Stop!" yelled Ostap, making gigantic leaps. "I'll fire the lot of you when I catch you!"

"Stop!" yelled the chairman.

"Stop, you fool!" Balaganov yelled at Kozlevich. "Can't you see we've left the boss behind!"

Adam Kazimirovich worked at the pedal and the Antelope

came to a screeching halt. The captain somersaulted into the car and gave a desperate shriek of "Full steam ahead!". Despite his cold-bloodedness, he could not bear the thought of physical retribution. Mad with fright, Kozlevich put the car into third whereupon the Antelope bucked, a door came open, and Balaganov fell out. This all happened in a second. Kozlevich braked again. The shadow of the rapidly advancing crowd reached Balaganov. Great big hands were already reaching out for him when the Antelope reversed up to him and the captain's iron hand caught him by his cowboy shirt.

"As fast as you can!" Ostap yelled.

It was at this point that the inhabitants of Luchansk first realised the advantages of mechanised transport over horse traction. The car's every joint creaked and it tore off, carrying the four law-breakers away from the punishment they deserved.

The crooks panted heavily for the first kilometre. Balaganov, who valued his good looks, examined the raspberry-coloured scratches he had got from falling out of the car in a pocket mirror. Panikovsky was trembling in his fireman's uniform. He was afraid of the captain's wrath. This came soon enough.

"Was it you who said to move off before I'd had time to get in?" the captain asked in threatening tones.

"I swear to God..." Panikovsky began.

"No, no, don't deny it! It's your kind of trick. So you're a coward into the bargain, eh? I've ended up in the company of a thief and a coward, eh? Good! I'm demoting you. Until now you were a fire brigade chief in my eyes but from now on you're just a plain fireman."

And Ostap ceremonially ripped the golden pumps from Panikovsky's red collar tabs.

After this procedure, Ostap informed his companions of the contents of the telegram.

"Things don't look too good. The telegram says that the green car travelling ahead of the race is to be stopped. We must turn off the route somewhere. We've had enough triumphs, laurels, and free lunches. The idea's been exploited to the full. We can only turn off onto the Gryazhskoye highway but that's still three hours to go. I'm sure that a warm welcome is being prepared for us in all the next inhabited spots. The damned telegraph has its poles and wires everywhere."

The captain had not made a mistake.

Ahead of them lay a town whose name the Antelopeans never discovered although they would have liked to in order to be able to remember it with an unkind word later on. The entrance to the town was blocked off by a heavy log. The Antelope turned away and, like a blind puppy, pushed on in search of a way round. But there wasn't one.

"Back!" said Ostap, now very serious.

It was at that moment that the crooks heard the distant mosquito hum of motors. Evidently the real racing cars were on their way. There was no way back, so the Antelopeans again flung themselves forward.

Kozlevich frowned and drove the car fast right up to the log. The citizens standing around it scattered in various directions, expecting a crash. Kozlevich, however, unexpectedly slowed down and drove slowly over the obstacle. As the Antelope charged through the town, passers-by swore at them but Ostap did not reply.

The noise of as yet invisible cars was considerably closer by the time the Antelope reached the Gryazhskoye highway. They barely managed to turn off the damned main road and to get the car hidden behind a small hill as night fell, before the revving of the motors reached a crescendo and the leading car appeared in the beams of many headlights. The crooks hid in the grass right by the roadside and, having suddenly lost their usual cheek, watched the column pass in silence.

Strips of blindingly bright light flickered over the road. The cars creaked softly as they rushed past the dejected Antelopeans. Their wheels flung up dust. Horns gave long wails. The wind swirled. In a minute, there was nothing left except for the last car's lone ruby rear light which rocked and swung for a long time in the darkness.

Real life had passed by, trumpeting merrily and flashing its shiny wings.

The only thing left for the adventurers was the smell of exhaust. They sat on in the grass for a long time, shaking the dust off themselves and sneezing.

"Yes," said Ostap, "now I can see for myself that a car is not a luxury but a means of transportation. Aren't you jealous, Balaganov? I am."

Translated by David Sinclair-Loutit

N. Ostrovsky

(b. 1904, village of Vilia near
Volyn—
d. 1936, Moscow)

Nikolai Ostrovsky was only thirty-two when he died, but he left a legend behind him. He and his work exemplify the human spirit at its finest. To understand him, we must consider the story of his life.

He began working at the age of ten washing dishes in a railway station restaurant. Subsequently he became assistant stoker at an electric power station. He was fifteen when he joined the YCL and went to the Civil War front as a volunteer. He fought bravely in the cavalry under Kotovsky and Budyonny. At 16, he was gravely wounded and discharged. He got a job as an electrician, and at the same time was secretary of the Komsomol organisation in the railway workshops. He was then transferred to organisational work for the YCL. Meanwhile, the serious consequences of his war wound were making themselves felt. He was only 23 when an inexorably progressing illness confined him to bed. At 24, he lost his sight. He mustered up all his spiritual re-

sources, undertook his own self-education and began writing. But fate had another terrible shock in store for him. His long story about Kotovsky's brigade was lost in the post. Unable to move, permanently bedridden, in terrible pain and operated upon eleven times, he still found the strength to accomplish a truly immortal feat: he wrote *HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED* (Part One, 1932; Part Two, 1934).

The novel was an enormous success. Ostrovsky corresponded with countless readers and literary people, spoke on the radio and wrote articles. He began work on a new three-volume novel—*BORN OF THE STORM*. Part One came out on the day of his funeral.

HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED had a powerful impact on the Soviet and international reading public who saw in it the symbol of a new and revolutionary faith, a sincere and fearless confession of a generation for whom there was no gap between convictions and deeds performed in the name of freedom and a happy future for mankind. The image of Pavel Korchagin is autobiographical. The integrity of his character shows not only in fighting and work but also in his relations with women. He unhesitatingly offers his hand in marriage to a young girl, Taya, at whose parents' flat he rents a room when he sees her degraded and humiliated. He rescues the girl from spiritual imprisonment in a philistine milieu and takes her with him, just as he sought to rescue the

whole of mankind from the toils of the old life. Pavel Korchagin's words have become a slogan for millions: "Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that dying, he might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world—the fight for the Liberation of Mankind."

How the Steel Was Tempered

(An excerpt)

Down below, the sea broke on the jagged chaos of rock. A stiff dry breeze blowing from distant Turkey fanned his face. The harbour, protected from the sea by a concrete mole, thrust itself in an irregular arc into the shore-line. And overlooking it all were the tiny white cottages of the town's outskirts perched on the slopes of the mountain range which broke off abruptly at the sea.

It was quiet here in the old park outside of the town. Yellow maple leaves floated slowly down onto its grassgrown paths.

The old Persian cabby who had driven Pavel out here from town could not help asking as his strange fare alighted:

"Why come here of all places? No young ladies, no amusements. Nothing but the jackals... What will you do here? Better let me drive you back to town, mister tovarish!"

Pavel paid him and the old man drove away.

The park was indeed a wilderness. Pavel found a bench on a cliff overlooking the sea, and sat down, lifting his face to the now mild autumn sun.

He had come to this quiet spot to think things over and consider what to do with his life. The time had come to review the situation and take some decision.

His second visit to the Kyutsams had brought the family strife to a head. The old man on learning of his arrival had flown into a rage. It fell naturally to Korchagin to lead the resistance. The old man unexpectedly encountered a vigorous rebuff from his wife and daughters, and from the first day of Pavel's arrival the house split into two hostile camps. The door leading to the parents' half of the house was locked and one of the small side rooms was rented to Korchagin. Pavel paid the rent in advance and the old man was somewhat mollified by the arrangement; now that his daughters had cut themselves off from him he would no longer be expected to support them.

For diplomatic reasons Albina remained with her husband. As for the old man, he kept strictly to his side of the house and avoided meeting the man he so heartily detested. But outside in the yard he made as much noise as possible to show that he was still the master.

Before he went to work in the co-operative shop, old Kyutsam had earned his living by shoemaking and carpentry and had built himself a small workshop in the backyard. To annoy his lodger, he shifted his work bench from the shed to a spot in the yard right under Pavel's window where he hammered furiously for hours on end, deriving a malicious satisfaction from the knowledge that he was interfering with Korchagin's reading.

"Just you wait," he hissed to himself, "I'll get you out of here..."

Far away a steamer laid a small dark trail of smoke over the sea at the very horizon. A flock of gulls skimmed the waves with piercing cries.

Pavel, his chin resting in his hand, sat lost in thought. His whole life passed swiftly before his mind's eye, from his childhood to the present. How had these twenty-four years of his been lived? Worthily or unworthily? He went over them again, year by year, subjecting them to sober, impartial judgement, and he found to his immense relief that he had not done so badly with his life. Mistakes there had been, the mistakes of youth, and chiefly of ignorance. But in the stormy days of struggle for Soviet power he had been in the thick of the fighting and on the crimson banner of Revolution there were a few drops of his own life's blood.

He had remained in the ranks until his strength had failed him. And now, struck down and unable to hold his place in the firing lines, there was nothing left for him but the field hospital. He remembered the time when they had stormed Warsaw and how, at the height of battle, one of the men had been hit. He fell to the ground under his horse's hooves. His comrades quickly bandaged his wounds, turned him over to the stretcher-bearers and sped onward in pursuit of the enemy. The squadron had not halted its advance for the sake of one fallen soldier. Thus it was in the fight for a great cause and thus it had to be. True, there were exceptions. He had seen legless machine-gunners on gun carriages in battle. These men had struck terror into the enemy's ranks, their guns had sown death and destruction, and their steel-like courage and unerring eye had made them the pride of their units. But such men were few.

What was he to do now that defeat had overtaken him and there was no longer any hope of returning to the ranks? Had

he not extracted from Bazhanova the admission that the future held even worse torment in store for him? What was to be done? The question was like a yawning abyss spreading at his feet.

What was there to live for now that he had lost what he prized most—the ability to fight? How was he to justify his existence today and in the cheerless tomorrow? How was he to fill his days? Exist merely to breathe, to eat and to drink? Remain a helpless bystander watching his comrades fight their way forward? Be a burden to the detachment? No, better to destroy his treacherous body! A bullet in the heart—and be done with it! A timely end to a life well lived. Who would condemn the soldier for putting himself out of his agony?

He felt the flat body of his Browning in his pocket. His fingers closed over the grip, and slowly he drew out the weapon.

“Who would have thought that you would come to this?”

The muzzle stared back at him with cold contempt. Pavel laid the pistol on his knee and cursed bitterly.

“Cheap heroics, my lad! Any fool can shoot himself. That is the easiest way out, the coward’s way. You can always put a bullet through your head when life hits you too hard. But have you tried getting the better of life? Are you sure you have done everything you can to break out of the steel trap? Have you forgotten the fighting at Novgorod-Volynsky when we went into the attack seventeen times in one day until finally, in spite of everything, we won through? Put away that gun and never breathe a word of this to anyone. Learn how to go on living when life becomes unbearable. Make your life useful.”

He got up and went down to the road. A passing mountaineer gave him a lift on his cart. When they reached town he got off and bought a newspaper and read the announcement of a meeting of the city Party group in the Demyan Bedny Club. It was very late when he returned home that night. He had made a speech at the meeting, little suspecting that it was the last he was ever to make at a large public gathering.

Taya was still awake when he got home. She had been worried at Pavel’s prolonged absence. What had happened to him? She remembered the grim, cold look she had observed that morning in his eyes, always so live and warm. He never

liked to talk about himself, but she felt that he was under some severe mental strain.

As the clock in her mother's room chimed two she heard the gate creak and, slipping on her jacket, she went to open the door. Lola, asleep in her own room, murmured restlessly as Taya passed her.

"I was beginning to get worried," Taya whispered with relief when Pavel came in.

"Nothing is going to happen to me as long as I live, Taya," he whispered. "Lola's asleep? I am not the least bit sleepy for some reason. I have something to tell you. Let's go to your room so as not to wake Lola."

Taya hesitated. It was very late. How could she let him come to her room at this late hour? What would mother think? But she could not refuse for fear of offending him. What could he have to say to her, she wondered, as she led the way to her room.

"This is how it is, Taya," Pavel began in a low voice. He sat down opposite her in the dimly-lighted room, so close that she could feel his breath. "Life takes such strange turns that you begin to wonder sometimes. I have had a bad time of it these past few days. I did not know how I could go on living. Life had never seemed so black. But today I held a meeting of my own private 'political bureau' and adopted a decision of tremendous importance. Don't be surprised at what I have to say."

He told her what he had gone through in the past few months and much of what had passed through his mind during his visit to the park.

"That is the situation. Now for the most important thing. The storm in this family is only beginning. We must get out of here into the fresh air and as far away from this hole as possible. We must start life afresh. Once I have taken a hand in this fight I'm going to see it through. Our life, yours and mine, is none too happy at present. I have decided to breathe some warmth into it. Do you know what I mean? Will you be my life's companion, my wife?"

Taya was deeply moved by his confession, but these last words startled her.

"I am not asking you for an answer tonight," he went on "You must think it over carefully. I suppose you cannot understand how such things can be put so bluntly without the

usual courting. But you and I have no need of all that nonsense. I give you my hand, little girl, here it is. If you will put your trust in me you will not be mistaken. We can both give each other a great deal. Now, here is what I have decided: our compact will be in force until you grow up to be a real human being, a true Bolshevik. If I can't help you in that I am not worth a kopeck. We must not break our compact until then. But when you grow up you will be freed of all obligations. Who knows what may happen? I may become a complete physical wreck, and in that case, remember, you must not consider yourself bound to me in any way."

He fell silent for a few moments, then he went on in a tender, caressing voice: "And for the present, I offer you my friendship and my love."

He held her fingers in his, feeling at peace, as if she had already given her consent.

"Do you promise never to leave me?"

"I can only give you my word, Taya. It is for you to believe that men like me do not betray their friends... I only hope they will not betray me," he added bitterly.

"I can't give you an answer tonight. It is all very sudden," she replied.

Pavel got up.

"Go to bed, Taya. It will soon be morning."

He went to his own room and lay down on the bed without undressing and was asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

The desk by the window in Pavel's room was piled high with books from the Party library, newspapers and several notebooks filled with notes. A bed, two chairs and a huge map of China dotted with tiny black and red flags pinned up over the door between his room and Taya's, completed the furnishings. The people in the local Party Committee had agreed to supply Pavel with books and periodicals and had promised to instruct the manager of the biggest public library in town to send him whatever he needed. Before long large parcels of books began to arrive. Lola was amazed at the way he would sit over his books from early morning, reading and making notes all day long with only short breaks for breakfast and dinner. In the evenings, which he always spent with the two sisters, he would relate to them what he had read.

Long past midnight old Kyutsam would see a chink of light between the shutters of the room occupied by his unwelcome lodger. He would creep over to the window on tiptoe and peer in through the crack at the head bent over the books.

"Decent folks are in their beds at this hour but he keeps the light burning all night long. He behaves as if he were the master here. The girls have got altogether out of hand since he came," the old man would grumble to himself as he retired to his own quarters.

For the first time in eight years Pavel found himself with plenty of time on his hands, and no duties of any kind to attend to. He made good use of his time, reading with the avid eagerness of the newly-enlightened. He studied eighteen hours a day. How much longer his health could have withstood the strain is hard to say, but a seemingly casual remark from Taya one day changed everything.

"I have moved the chest of drawers away from the door leading to your room. If ever you want to talk to me you can come straight in. You don't need to go through Lola's room."

The blood rushed to Pavel's cheeks. Taya smiled happily. Their compact was sealed.

The old man no longer saw the chink of light through the shuttered window of the corner room, and Taya's mother began to notice a glow in her daughter's eyes that betrayed a happiness she could not conceal. The faint shadows under her eyes spoke of sleepless nights. Often now Taya's singing and the strumming of a guitar echoed through the little house.

Yet Taya's happiness was not unmarred; her awakened womanhood rebelled against the clandestine relationship. She trembled at every sound, fancying that she heard her mother's footsteps. What if they asked her why she had taken to closing her door on the latch at night? The thought tormented her. Pavel noticed her fears and tried to comfort her.

"What are you afraid of?" he would say tenderly. "After all, you and I are grown-up people. Sleep in peace. No one shall intrude on our lives."

Comforted, she would press her cheek against his breast, and fall asleep, her arms around her loved one. And he would lie awake, listening to her steady breathing, keeping quite still lest he disturb her slumber, his whole being flooded with a

deep tenderness for this girl who had entrusted her life to him.

Lola was the first to discover the reason for the shining light in Taya's eyes, and from that day the shadow of estrangement fell between the two sisters. Soon the mother too found out, or rather, guessed. And she was troubled. She had not expected it of Korchagin.

"Taya is not the wife for him," she remarked to Lola. "What will come of it, I wonder?"

Alarming thoughts beset her but she could not muster the courage to speak to Korchagin.

Young people began visiting Pavel, and sometimes his little room could barely hold them all. The sound of their voices like the beehive's hum reached the old man's ears and often he could hear them singing in chorus:

*Forbidding is this sea of ours,
Night and day its angry voice is heard...*

and Pavel's favourite:

The whole wide world is drenched with tears...

It was the study circle of young workers which the Party Committee had assigned to Pavel in response to his insistent request for propaganda work.

Once more he had gripped the helm firmly with both hands, and the ship of life, having veered dangerously a few times, was now steering a new course. His dream of returning to the ranks through study and learning was on the way to being realised.

But life continued to heap obstacles in his path, and bitterly he saw each obstacle as a further delay to the attainment of his goal.

One day the ill-starred student George turned up from Moscow, bringing a wife with him. He put up at the house of his father-in-law, a lawyer, and from there continued to pester his mother with demands for money.

George's coming widened the rift in the Kyutsam family. George at once sided with his father, and together with his wife's family, which was inclined to be anti-Soviet, he sought by underhand means to drive Korchagin out of the house and induce Taya to break with him.

Two weeks after George's arrival Lola got a job in another

town and she left, taking her mother and her little son with her. Soon afterward, Pavel and Taya moved to a distant seaside town.

Artem did not often receive letters from his brother and the sight of an envelope with the familiar handwriting waiting for him on his desk in the City Soviet always made his heart beat faster. Today too as he opened the envelope he thought tenderly:

“Ah, Pavel! If only you lived nearer to me. I could do with your advice, lad.”

“Artem, I am writing to tell you all that has happened to me lately. I do not write such things to anyone but you. But I know I can confide in you because you know me well and you will understand.

“Life continues to press down on me on the health front, dealing me blow upon blow. I hardly managed to struggle to my feet after one blow when another, more merciless than the last, lays me low. The most terrible thing is that I am powerless to resist. First I lost the power of my left arm. And now, as if that were not enough, my legs have failed me. I could barely move about (within the limits of the room, of course) as it was, but now I have difficulty in crawling from bed to table. And I daresay there is worse to come. What tomorrow will bring me no one knows.

“I never leave the house now, and only a tiny fragment of the sea is visible from my window. Can there be a greater tragedy than that of a man who combines in himself a treacherous body that refuses to obey him, and the heart of a Bolshevik, a Bolshevik who passionately yearns to work, to be with all of you in the ranks of the fighters advancing along the whole front in the midst of the stormy avalanche?

“I still believe that I shall return to the ranks, that in time my bayonet will take its place in the attacking columns. I must believe that, I have no right not to. For ten years the Party and the Komsomol taught me to fight, and the leader’s words, spoken to all of us, apply equally to me: ‘There are no fortresses Bolsheviks cannot take.’

“My life now is spent entirely in study. Books, books and more books. I have accomplished a great deal, Artem. I have

read and studied all the classics, and have passed my examinations in the first year of the correspondence course at the Communist University. In the evenings I lead a study circle of Communist youth. These young comrades are my link with the practical life of the Party organisation. Then there is Taya's education, and of course love, and the tender caresses of my little wife. Taya and I are the best of friends. Our household is very simply run—with my pension of thirty-two rubles and Taya's earnings we get along quite well. Taya is following the path I myself took to the Party: for a time she worked as a domestic help, and now has a job as a dishwasher in a canteen (there is no industry in this town).

"The other day she proudly showed me her first delegate's credentials issued by the Women's Department. This is not simply a strip of cardboard to her. In her I see the birth of the new woman, and I am doing my best to help in this birth. The time will come when she will work in a big factory, where as part of a large working community she will become politically mature. But she is taking the only possible course open to her here.

"Taya's mother has visited us twice. Unconsciously she is trying to drag Taya back to a life of petty, personal selfish cares. I tried to make Albina see that she ought not to allow the shadow of her own unhappy past to darken the path her daughter has chosen. But it was no use. I feel that one day the mother will try to stand in her daughter's way and then a clash will be unavoidable. I shake your hand.

"Your Pavel."

Sanatorium No. 5 in Old Matsesta... A three-storey brick building standing on a ledge hewed into the mountain-side. Thick woods all around and a road winding down to the sea. The windows are open and the breeze carries the smell of the sulphur springs into the room. Pavel Korchagin is alone in the room. Tomorrow new patients will arrive and then he will have a room-mate. He hears steps outside the window and the sound of a familiar voice. Several people are talking. But where has he heard that deep bass voice before? From the dim recesses of his memory, hidden away but not forgotten, comes the name: "Ledenev. He and none other."

Pavel confidently called to his friend, and a moment later Ledenev was beside his bed shaking his hand warmly.

"So Korchagin is still going strong? Well, and what have you got to say for yourself? Don't tell me you have decided to get sick in real earnest? That will never do! You should take an example from me. The doctors have tried to put me on the shelf too, but I keep going just to spite them." And Ledenev laughed merrily.

But Pavel felt the sympathy and distress hidden behind that laughter.

They spent two hours together. Ledenev told Pavel all the latest news from Moscow. From him Pavel first heard of the important decisions taken by the Party on the collectivisation of agriculture and the reorganisation of life in the village and he eagerly drank in every word.

"Here I was thinking you were busy stirring things up somewhere at home in the Ukraine," said Ledenev. "You disappoint me. But never mind, I was in an even worse way. I thought I'd be tied to my bed for good, and now you see I'm still on my feet. There's no taking life easy nowadays. It simply won't work! I must confess I find myself thinking sometimes how nice it would be to take a little rest, just to catch your breath. After all, I'm not as young as I was, and ten and twelve hours' work a day is a bit hard on me at times. Well, I think about it for a while and even try to ease the load a little, but it's no use. Before you know it, you're up to your ears again, never getting home before midnight. The more powerful the machine, the faster the wheels run, and with us the speed increases every day, so that we old folk simply have to stay young."

Ledenev passed a hand over his high forehead and said in a kindly manner:

"And now tell me about yourself."

Pavel gave Ledenev an account of his life since they had last met, and as he talked he felt his friend's warm approving glance on him.

Under the shade of spreading trees in one corner of the terrace a group of sanatorium patients were seated around a small table. One of them was reading the *Pravda*, his bushy eyebrows knitted. The black Russian shirt, the shabby old cap and the sunburnt unshaved face with deep-sunken blue eyes

all bespoke the veteran miner. It was twelve years since Khrisanf Chernokozov had left the mines to take up an important post in the government, yet he seemed to have just come up from the pit. Everything about him, his bearing, his gait, his manner of speaking, betrayed his profession.

Chernokozov was a member of the Territorial Party Bureau besides. A painful disease was sapping his strength: Chernokozov hated his gangrenous leg which had kept him tied to his bed for nearly half a year now.

Opposite him, puffing thoughtfully on her cigarette, was Zhigareva—Alexandra Alexeyevna Zhigareva, who had been a Party member for nineteen of her thirty-seven years. “Shurochka the metalworker”, as her comrades in the St. Petersburg underground movement used to call her, had been hardly more than a girl when she was exiled to Siberia.

The third member of the group was Pankov. His handsome head with the sculptured profile was bent over a German magazine, and now and then he raised his hand to adjust his enormous horn-rimmed spectacles. It was painful to see this thirty-year-old man of athletic build dragging his paralysed leg after him. An editor and writer, Pankov worked in the People’s Commissariat for Education. He was an authority on Europe and knew several foreign languages. He was a man of considerable erudition and even the reserved Chernokozov treated him with great respect.

“So that is your room-mate?” Zhigareva whispered to Chernokozov, nodding toward the chair in which Pavel Korchagin was seated.

Chernokozov looked up from his newspaper and his brow cleared at once.

“Yes! That’s Korchagin. You ought to know him, Shura. It’s too bad illness has put many a spoke in his wheel, otherwise that lad would be a great help to us in tight spots. He belongs to the first Komsomol generation. I am convinced that if we give him our support—and that’s what I have decided to do—he will still be able to work.”

Pankov too listened to what Chernokozov was saying.

“What is he suffering from?” Shura Zhigareva asked softly.

“The aftermath of the Civil War. Some trouble with his spine. I spoke to the doctor here and he told me there is a danger of total paralysis. Poor lad!”

“I shall go and bring him over here,” said Shura.

That was the beginning of their friendship. Pavel did not know then that Zhigareva and Chernokozov were to become very dear to him and that in the years of illness ahead of him they were to be his mainstays.

Life flowed on as before. Taya worked and Pavel studied. Before he had time to resume his work with the study groups another disaster stole upon him unawares. Both his legs were completely paralysed. Now only his right hand obeyed him. He bit his lips until the blood came when after repeated efforts he finally realised that he could not move. Taya bravely hid her despair and bitterness at being powerless to help him. But he said to her with an apologetic smile:

"You and I must separate, Taya. After all, this was not in our compact. I shall think it over properly today, little girl!"

She would not let him speak. The sobs burst forth and she hid her face against his chest in a paroxysm of weeping.

When Artem learned of his brother's latest misfortune he wrote to his mother. Maria Yakovlevna left everything and went at once to her son. Now the three lived together. Taya and the old lady took to each other from the first.

Pavel carried on with his studies in spite of everything.

One winter's evening Taya came home to report her first victory—she had been elected to the City Soviet. After that Pavel saw very little of her. When her day's work in the sanatorium kitchen was over Taya would go straight to the Soviet, returning home late at night weary but full of impressions. She was about to apply for candidate membership in the Party and was preparing for the long-awaited day with eager anticipation. And then misfortune struck another blow. The steadily progressing disease was doing its work. A burning excruciating pain suddenly seared Pavel's right eye, spreading rapidly to the left. A black curtain fell, blotting out all about him, and for the first time in his life Pavel knew the horror of total blindness.

A new obstacle had moved noiselessly onto his path barring his way. A terrifying, seemingly insurmountable obstacle. It plunged Taya and his mother into despair. But he, frigidly calm, resolved:

"I must wait and see what happens. If there is really no possibility of advancing, if everything I have done to return to

the ranks has been swept away by this blindness I must put an end to it all."

Pavel wrote to his friends and they wrote back urging him to take courage and carry on the fight.

It was in these days of grim struggle for him that Taya came home radiant and announced:

"I am a candidate to the Party, Pavel!"

Pavel listened to her excited account of the meeting at which her application was accepted and remembered his own initial steps in the Party.

"Well, Comrade Korchagina, you and I are a Communist faction now," he said, squeezing her hand.

The next day he wrote to the secretary of the District Party Committee asking the latter to come and see him. The same evening a mud-spattered car drew up outside the house and in a few moments Volmer, a middle-aged Lett with a spreading beard that reached to his ears, was pumping Pavel's hand.

"Well, how goes it? What do you mean by behaving like this, eh? Up with you and we'll send you off to work in the village at once," he said with a breezy laugh.

He stayed for two hours, forgetting all about the conference he was to have attended. He paced up and down the room, listening to Pavel's impassioned appeal for work.

"Stop talking about study groups," he said when Pavel had finished. "You've got to rest. And we must see about your eyes. It may still be possible to do something. What about going to Moscow and consulting a specialist? You ought to think it over..."

But Pavel interrupted him:

"I want people, Comrade Volmer, live, flesh-and-blood people! I need them now more than ever before. I cannot go on living alone. Send the youth to me, those with the least experience. They're veering too much to the left out there in the villages, the collective farms don't give them enough scope, they want to organise communes. You know the Komsomols, if you don't hold them back they're liable to try and dash forward ahead of the lines, I was like that myself."

Volmer stopped in his tracks.

"How do you come to know about that? They only brought the news in today from the district."

Pavel smiled.

"My wife told me. Perhaps you remember her? She was admitted to the Party yesterday."

"Korchagina, the dishwasher? So that's your wife! I didn't know that!" He fell silent for a few moments, then he slapped his forehead as an idea occurred to him. "I know whom we'll send you. Lev Bersenev. You couldn't wish for a better comrade. He's a man after your own heart, the two of you ought to get along famously. Like two high-voltage transformers. I was an electrician once, you know. Lev will rig up a wireless for you, he's an expert at that sort of thing. I often sit up till two in the morning at his place with those earphones. The wife actually got suspicious. Wanted to know what I meant by coming home so late."

Korchagin smiled.

"Who is Bersenev?" he asked.

Volmer ceased his pacing and sat down.

"He's our notary public, although he's no more notary public really than I am a ballet dancer. He held an important post until quite recently. Been in the movement since 1912 and a Party member since the Revolution. Served in the Civil War on the revolutionary tribunal of the Second Cavalry Army; that was the time they were combing out the Whiteguard lice in the Caucasus. He was in Tsaritsyn too, and on the Southern Front as well. Then for a time he was a member of the Supreme Military Court of the Far Eastern Republic. Had a very tough time of it there. Finally tuberculosis got him. He left the Far East and came down here to the Caucasus. At first he worked as chairman of a gubernia court, and vice-chairman of a territorial court. And then his lung trouble knocked him out completely. It was a matter of coming down here and taking it easy or giving up the ghost. So that's how we come to have such a remarkable notary. It's a nice quiet job too, just the thing for him. Well, gradually the people here got him to take up a group. After that he was elected to the District Committee, then, before he knew it, he had charge of a political school, and now they've put him on the Control Commission. He's a permanent member on all important commissions appointed to unravel nasty tangles. Apart from all that he goes in for hunting, he's a passionate radio fan, and although he has only one lung, you wouldn't believe it to look at him. He is simply bursting with energy. When he dies it'll be somewhere

on the way between the District Committee and the court.”

Pavel cut him short.

“Why do you load him down like that?” he asked sharply. “He is doing more work here than before!”

Volmer gave him a quizzical look:

“And if I give you a study circle and something else Lev would be sure to say: ‘Why must you load him down like that?’ But he himself says he’d rather have one year of intensive work than five years on his back in hospital. It looks as if we’ll have to build socialism before we can take proper care of our people.”

“That’s true. I too prefer one year of life to five years of stagnation, but we are sometimes criminally wasteful of our energies. I know now that this is less a sign of heroism than of inefficiency and irresponsibility. Only now have I begun to see that I had no right to be so stupidly careless about my own health. I see now that there was nothing heroic about it at all. I might have held out a few more years if it hadn’t been for that misguided Spartanism. In other words, the infantile disease of leftism is one of the chief dangers.”

“That’s what he says now,” thought Volmer, “but let him get back on his feet and he’ll forget everything but work.” But he said nothing.

The following evening Lev Bersenev came. It was midnight before he left Pavel. He went away feeling as if he had found a brother.

In the morning a wireless antenna was set up on the roof of Korchagin’s house, while Lev busied himself inside the house with the receiving set, regaling Pavel the while with interesting stories from his past. Pavel could not see him, but from what Taya had told him he knew that Lev was a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed young man with impulsive gestures, which was exactly as Pavel had pictured him the moment they had first met.

When evening came three valves began to glow in the room. Lev triumphantly handed Pavel the earphones. A chaos of sounds filled the ether. The transmitters in the port chirped like so many birds, and somewhere not far out at sea a ship’s wireless was sending out an endless stream of dots and dashes. But in this vortex of noises and sounds jostling one another the tuning coil picked out and clung to a calm and confident voice:

"This is Moscow calling..."

The tiny wireless set brought sixty broadcasting stations in different parts of the world within Pavel's reach. The life from which he had been debarred broke through to him from the earphone membranes, and once again he felt its mighty pulse.

Noticing the glow of pleasure in Pavel's eyes, the weary Bersenev smiled with satisfaction.

The big house was hushed. Taya murmured restlessly in her sleep. Pavel saw little of his wife these days. She came home late, worn out and shivering from cold. Her work claimed more and more of her time and seldom did she have a free evening. Pavel remembered what Bersenev had told him on this score:

"If a Bolshevik has a wife who is his Party comrade they rarely see one another. But this has two advantages: they never get tired of each other, and there's no time to quarrel!"

And indeed, how could he object? It was only to be expected. There was a time when Taya had devoted all her evenings to him. There had been more warmth and tenderness in their relationship then. But she had been only a wife, a mate to him; now she was his pupil and his Party comrade.

He knew that the more Taya matured politically, the less time she would be able to give him, and he bowed to the inevitable. He was given a study group to lead and once again a noisy hum of voices filled the house in the evenings. These hours spent with the youth infused Pavel with new energy and vigour.

The rest of the time went in listening to the radio, and his mother had difficulty in tearing him away from the earphones at mealtimes.

The radio gave him what his blindness had taken from him—the opportunity to acquire knowledge, and this consuming passion for learning helped him to forget the pain that racked his body, the fire that seared his eyes and all the misery an unkind fate had heaped upon him.

When the radio brought the news from Magnitostroi of the exploits of the Komsomols who had succeeded Pavel's generation he was filled with happiness.

He pictured the cruel blizzards, the bitter Ural frosts as vicious as a pack of hungry wolves. He heard the howling of

the wind and saw amid the whirling of the snow a detachment of second-generation Komsomols working in the light of arc lamps glazing the roof of the giant factory buildings to save the first sections of the huge plant from the ravages of snow and ice. Compared to this, how tiny seemed the forest construction job on which the first generation of Kiev Komsomols had battled with the elements! The country had grown, and with it, the people.

And on the Dnieper, the water had burst through the steel barriers and swept away men and machines. And again the Komsomol youth had hurled themselves into the breach, and after a furious two-day battle had brought the unruly torrent back under control. A new Komsomol generation marched in the van of this great struggle. And among the heroes Pavel heard with pride the name of his old comrade Ignat Pankratov.

They spent the first few days in Moscow with a friend who was arranging for Pavel to enter a special clinic.

Only now did Pavel realise how much easier it had been to be brave when he had his youth and a strong body. Now that life held him in its iron grip to hold out was a matter of honour.

It was a year and a half since Pavel Korchagin had come to Moscow. Eighteen months of indescribable anguish.

In the eye clinic Professor Averbach had told Pavel quite frankly that there was no hope of recovering his sight. Some time in the future, when the inflammation disappeared it might be possible to operate on the pupils. In the meantime he advised an operation to halt the inflammatory process.

Pavel gave his consent; he told his doctors to do everything they thought necessary.

Three times he felt the touch of Death's bony fingers as he lay for hours at a time on the operating table with lancets probing his throat to remove the parathyroid gland. But he clung tenaciously to life and, after long hours of anguished suspense, Taya would find him deathly pale but alive and as calm and gentle as always.

"Don't worry, little girl, it's not so easy to kill me. I'll go on living and kicking up a fuss if only to upset the

calculations of the learned doctors. They are right in everything they say about my health, but they are gravely mistaken when they try to write me off as totally unfit for work. I'll show them yet."

Pavel was determined to resume his place in the ranks of the builders of the new life. He knew now what he had to do.

Winter was over, spring had burst through the open windows, and Pavel, having survived another operation, resolved that, weak as he was, he would remain in hospital no longer. To live so many months in the midst of human suffering, to have to listen to the groans of the incurably sick was far harder for him than to endure his own anguish.

And so when another operation was proposed, he refused.

"No," he said firmly. "I've had enough. I have shed enough blood for science. I have other uses for what is left."

That day Pavel wrote a letter to the Central Committee, explaining that since it was now useless for him to continue his wanderings in search of medical treatment, he wished to remain in Moscow where his wife was now working. It was the first time he had turned to the Party for help. His request was granted and the Moscow Soviet gave him living quarters. Pavel left the hospital with the fervent hope that he might never return.

The modest room in a quiet side lane off Kropotkinskaya Street seemed to him the height of luxury. And often, waking at night, Pavel would find it hard to believe that hospital was indeed a thing of the past for him now.

Taya was a full-fledged Party member by now. She was an excellent worker, and in spite of the tragedy of her personal life, she did not lag behind the best shock workers at the factory. Her fellow workers soon showed their respect for this quiet, unassuming young woman by electing her a member of the factory trade-union committee. Pride for his wife, who was proving to be a true Bolshevik, made Pavel's sufferings easier to bear.

Bazhanova came to Moscow on business and paid him a visit. They had a long talk. Pavel grew animated as he told her of his plans to return in the near future to the fighting ranks.

Bazhanova noticed the wisp of silver on Pavel's temples and she said softly:

"I see that you have gone through a great deal. Yet you have lost none of your enthusiasm. And that is the main thing. I am glad that you have decided to begin the work for which you have been preparing these past five years. But how do you intend to go about it?"

Pavel smiled confidently.

"Tomorrow my friends are bringing me a sort of cardboard stencil, which will enable me to write without getting the lines mixed up. I couldn't write without it. I hit upon the idea after much thought. You see, the stiff edges of the cardboard will keep my pencil from straying off the straight line. Of course, it is very hard to write without seeing what you are writing, but it is not impossible. I have tried it and I know. It took me some time to get the knack of it, but now I have learned to write more slowly, taking pains with every letter and the result is quite satisfactory."

And so Pavel began to work.

He had conceived the idea of writing a novel about the heroic Kotovsky Division. The title came of itself: *Born of the Storm*.

His whole life was now geared to the writing of his book. Slowly, line by line, the pages emerged. He worked oblivious to his surroundings, wholly immersed in the world of images, and for the first time he suffered the throes of creation, knew the bitterness the artist feels when vivid, unforgettable scenes so tangibly perceptible turn pallid and lifeless on paper.

He had to remember everything he wrote, word by word. The slightest interruption caused him to lose the thread of his thoughts and retarded his work.

Sometimes he had to recite aloud whole pages and even chapters from memory, and there were moments when his mother feared that he was losing his mind. She did not dare approach him while he worked, but as she picked up the sheets that had fallen on the floor she would say timidly:

"I do wish you would do something else, Pavlusha. It can't be good for you to keep writing all the time like this..."

He would laugh heartily at her fears and assure the old lady that she need not worry, he hadn't "gone crazy yet".

Three chapters of the book were finished. Pavel sent them to Odessa to his old fighting comrades from the Kotovsky Division for their opinion, and before long he received a letter praising his work. But on its way back to him the manuscript was lost in the mails. Six months' work was gone. It was a terrible blow to him. Bitterly he regretted having sent off the only copy he possessed. Ledenev scolded him roundly when he heard what had happened.

"How could you have been so careless? But never mind, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You must begin over again."

"But I have been robbed of six months' work. Eight hours of strenuous labour every day. Curse the parasites!"

Ledenev did his best to console his friend.

There was nothing for it but to start afresh. Ledenev supplied him with paper and helped him to get the manuscript typed. Six weeks later the first chapter was rewritten.

A family by the name of Alexeyev lived in the same apartment as the Korchagins. The eldest son, Alexander, was secretary of one of the district committees of the Komsomol. His sister Galya, a lively girl of eighteen, had finished a factory training school. Pavel asked his mother to speak to Galya and find out whether she would agree to help him with his work in the capacity of "secretary". Galya willingly agreed. She came in one day, smiling pleasantly, and was delighted when she learned that Pavel was writing a novel.

"I shall be very glad to help you, Comrade Korchagin," she said. "It will be so much more fun than writing those dull circular letters for father about the maintenance of hygiene in communal apartments."

From that day Pavel's work progressed with doubled speed. Indeed so much was accomplished in one month that Pavel was amazed. Galya's lively participation and sympathy were a great help to him. Her pencil rustled swiftly over the paper, and whenever some passage particularly appealed to her she would read it over several times, taking sincere delight in Pavel's success. She was almost the only person in the house who believed in his work, the others felt that nothing would come of it and that Pavel was merely trying to fill in the hours of enforced idleness.

Ledenev, returning to Moscow after a business trip out of town, read the first few chapters and said:

"Carry on, my friend. I have no doubt that you will win.

You have great happiness in store for you, Pavel. I firmly believe that your dream of returning to the ranks will soon materialise. Don't lose hope, my son."

The old man went away deeply satisfied to have found Pavel so full of energy.

Galya came regularly, her pencil raced over the pages reviving scenes from the unforgettable past. In moments when Pavel lay lost in thought, overwhelmed by a flood of memory, Galya would watch his lashes quivering, and see his eyes reflecting the swift passage of thought. It seemed incredible that those eyes could not see, so alive were the clear, unblemished pupils.

When the day's work was over she would read what she had written and he would listen tensely, his brow wrinkled.

"Why are you frowning, Comrade Korchagin? It is good, isn't it?"

"No, Galya, it is bad."

The pages he did not like he rewrote himself. Hampered by the narrow strip of the stencil he would sometimes lose his patience and fling it from him. And then, furious with life for having robbed him of his eyesight, he would break his pencils and bite his lips until the blood came.

As the work drew to a close, forbidden emotions began more often to burst the bonds of his ever-vigilant will: sadness and all those simple human feelings, warm and tender, to which everyone but himself had the right. But he knew that were he to succumb to a single one of them the consequences would be tragic.

At last the final chapter was written. For the next few days Galya read the book aloud to Pavel.

Tomorrow the manuscript would be sent to Leningrad, to the Cultural Department of the Regional Party Committee. If the book was approved there, it would be turned over to the publishers—and then...

His heart beat anxiously at the thought. If all was well, the new life would begin, a life won by years of weary, unrelenting toil.

The fate of the book would decide Pavel's own fate. If the manuscript was rejected that would be the end for him. If, on the other hand, it was found to be bad only in part, if its

defects could be remedied by further work, he would launch a new offensive.

His mother took the parcel with the manuscript to the post office. Days of anxious waiting began. Never in his life had Pavel waited in such anguished suspense for a letter as he did now. He lived from the morning to the evening post. But no news came from Leningrad.

The continued silence of the publishers began to look ominous. From day to day the presentiment of disaster mounted, and Pavel admitted to himself that total rejection of his book would finish him. That, he could not endure. There would be no longer any reason to live.

At such moments he remembered the park on the hill overlooking the sea, and he asked himself the same question over and over again:

“Have you done everything you can to break out of the steel bonds and return to the ranks, to make your life useful?”

And he had to answer: “Yes, I believe I have done everything!”

At last, when the agony of waiting had become wellnigh unbearable, his mother, who had been suffering from the suspense no less than her son, came running into the room with the cry:

“News from Leningrad!”

It was a telegram from the Regional Committee. A terse message on a telegraph form: “Novel heartily approved. Turned over to publishers. Congratulations on your victory.”

His heart beat fast. His cherished dream was realised! The steel bonds have been burst, and now, armed with a new weapon, he had returned to the fighting ranks and to life.

1930-1934

Translated by Rosa Prokofieva

Part Two

1941-1977

ON THE DIALECTICS OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN LITERATURE

In the first two articles, I tried to disclose the sources of Soviet Russian literature's profoundly democratic traditions, beginning with the earliest period, and to explain why our writers preferred characters with an active and humanist approach to life. I also tried to account for the daring "breakthrough" by Soviet writers and Soviet art to the pinnacles of creative psychology: the best writers succeeded in disclosing the inner world of characters drawn from the people with a skill worthy of the classics themselves. Consequently, in discussing contemporary Soviet literature, I would like to begin with the vital and complex subject of Soviet Russian literature's aesthetic ideal and the evolution of that ideal during the last few decades.

In the course of its development, Soviet Russian literature undoubtedly preserved its own radical and fundamental characteristics. True, in many ways Alexander Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood* differs from, say, Konstantin Simonov's *The Living and the Dead*, as the reader may see for himself. These very different works, however, though written at an interval of nearly half a century, have a great deal in common, since they both follow the Soviet literary tradition. Moving in time, Soviet Russian literature develops something fundamental and characteristic of its own, the basis that we mentioned in the previous articles. It is a matter not of a new abstract quality, but a new quality of the aesthetic categories which are the very heart of Soviet literature and determine what is permanent in it.

To clarify this idea, let us ask ourselves the following question: Do the ideas of the Soviet writer of the 60s and 70s differ in any way from those of his counterpart of, say, the 20s over what man should be like, the conception of the beautiful and the source of man's happiness?

At its present stage the conception of the beautiful in man, nature and society includes all the best that has been evolved

throughout our country's heroic history; but it is not something rigid and immutable. The aesthetic ideal is a concept that moves and develops with the changes in reality itself. What, then, has been preserved and what is new in this movement? What is its abiding basis, and what has proved to be historically transient?

Going through the items in the first part of this anthology, the reader will have seen that, as represented by the authors of the poems, short stories and novels, moral qualities like selflessness on the one hand and self-denial on the other have inevitably coincided. However, these moral categories, which inevitably went side by side for a long time during the heroic and troubled history of our country, comprise different aspects of human life, and it would be a bad mistake to assume that they should always be inseparable. No, selflessness, living for the sake of other people, remains; obligatory self-denial caused by temporary difficulties passes.

Let us examine the dialectics of these two different categories. Life for Soviet people during the early post-revolutionary years was filled with heroic efforts and sacrifices. The people had to withstand and defeat their enemies by dint of harsh struggle and twice, in a short period of time, restore the war-ravaged economy. We cannot discount these decisive circumstances when considering Soviet literature's aesthetic ideal.

In Vladimir Fomenko's well-known novel, *The Memory of Earth*, based on the great Volga-Don canal project of the 50s, the following significant scene takes place: Golikov, Secretary of the District Party Committee, asks an old Cossack named Fryanskov about his views on the transfer of the farm to a new place since, in connection with the canal construction project and the creation of the Tsimlyanskoye Reservoir, many districts are in the zone which is to be flooded. Instead of a direct answer, he gets Uncle Fryanskov's autobiography. This life story is so instructive and has such far-reaching implications that I would like to quote it in full. It begins with the First World War.

"I served all through that lousy war. From start to finish. I came back here, to my native farm, and though I was as thoroughly whacked as a crocodile on ice, I started producing a revolution here.... I produced it, and then I thought: 'Now I'll

start living and enjoying myself, seeing as it's all mine—the waters, and the bowels of the earth, and my own plenipotentary power.'

"'No,' they tell me. 'Hang on a bit. You've still got to produce the struggle with famine, and typhus and, worst of all, the bandits'.

"'By all means,' say I. So I arm myself with my old pal Sabre again, and I lose a leg in the fighting.... Anyway, to cut a long story short, we've wiped out the bandits, we've put an end to the famine, so now I can start living!

"'No', they say, 'let's have collectivisation and five-year plans fulfilled in four.'

"We got them all. And then comes this Hitler. So we put an end to Hitler, and in his own lair, too.... And when we take Berlin, we spend the next five years without sleep or rest or unbending our backs and we produce the period of restoration with flying colours. Now we can start really enjoying life!

"'No,' they say. 'Come on, Lavr Kuzmich, transform the climate. Shift out of the farm and you really can start living after that.' But I'm seventy-six. Tomorrow I'll be useless." Very pleased with himself, Fryanskov chuckled, his naked gums shining."

This humorous little saga is the stark reality not just of Lavr Fryanskov's life, but of what our whole people endured. However, he tells the story not to feel sorry for himself, but to explain where the strength came from and where it will come from in future.

"Have I the right to live in peace in my old age or haven't I?" demanded Fryanskov of the now thoughtful Party secretary. "You've nothing to say?... Matvei Grigorich Shepetkov (a Civil War hero—*Yu.A.*) only had two years at school, but he didn't keep his mouth shut. We'd be nearly fainting on a long ride, and we'd ask him: 'Matvei Grigorich, let's have a rest.' And he'd be half dead, having been badly wounded himself; but he'd straighten up in the saddle like a champion and say: 'There's never going to be any rest for you or for me personally. Seeing,' he'd say, 'as we're Red revolutionaries, our whole life's a struggle!'"

And later on Fryanskov said bluntly: "I want all the bosses here to treat me like that—like Shepetkov. No nonsense! Matvei Grigorich would never have told a lot of lies about

how wonderful and fine it was going to be for me when I left my native farm. He'd say it would be no joke for me, leaving the village I was born in, but the revolution demanded it!"

Man's revolutionary duty demanded total self-sacrifice and dedication in work and in battle—"victory or death"—that was how things stood. Can Fryanskov and his kind, the known and unknown makers of our history, be called the heroes of Soviet literature? Certainly: heroes in life and in literature. The aesthetic ideal of the literature of those years of trial attained its most perfect embodiment in the very people who found happiness in the struggle for the happiness of future generations. The supreme example of this is Pavel Korchagin, hero of Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*. However, people like Pavel Korchagin (and like Lavr Fryanskov too) did not consider that their own lives and paths should be followed by future generations. "To live to one's full satisfaction", in the words of the old Cossack, is to live otherwise, in different conditions.

Ideas about the richness and beauty of the human personality and about the remarkable possibilities inherent in man's intellectual and emotional world were extremely high in the years when Soviet literature was coming into being. But all the remarkable spiritual forces of the heroes in the works of, say, Dmitry Furmanov or Alexander Fadeyev, like the strivings of Pavel Korchagin, were aimed at struggle. And if these heroes (like the whole Soviet people) had lived differently at that time, the world would be a much grimmer place today.

We bear this dialectic complexity in mind when considering the history of our literature. On the one hand, Soviet literature has always envisaged life as a sunny festival of the free man and has always affirmed the ideal of the harmonious and beautiful personality. On the other hand, it has inevitably mirrored the truth of life, the necessity for harsh struggle demanding self-denial and as much effort as is humanly possible.

There have been no changes in the high ideals of our philosophy or of our system which propose the selflessness of each in the struggle for the new society and the new man. Characters with the elements of heroism in their nature have always been of paramount importance in Soviet literature. But

historically engendered self-denial becomes redundant. Our difficulties were temporary, not absolute, and more often than not proved typical for the typical character in Soviet writing during the first decades. It would be wrong to suppose that they had to remain typical indefinitely.

In the Soviet Union, the necessary material conditions have been created, and are improving all the time, for the free and all-round development of the personality and, with them, the conditions for the natural solution of the historically engendered contradiction of the early revolutionary years and the post-war period—that between the ideal of the fully developed personality and the adverse circumstances of life.

Needless to say, every writer forms his own aesthetic ideal according to his own talents and experience of life. But our men of letters undoubtedly proceed from ideas about the human type who is put forward by reality itself and who holds the future in his hands.

Whichever of the works in this selection you consult, reader, you will see that the aesthetic ideal of the contemporary writer attains its fullest development in heroes whose conscience is sensitive, as, indeed, it always had been, who give generously of themselves for others, and yet who are “open” to life in all its variety.

Unity of social aspirations in no way means the levelling down of the spiritual life or monotony of intellectual or emotional experience. For instance, the soldiers portrayed by Tvardovsky, Polevoi, Simonov and Baklanov are not in the least alike as people and personalities, although in what matters most—their patriotism—they are very close indeed.

Abramov's peasants, Leonov's scientists, the workers of Granin and Kochetov, Markov's executives, Shukshin's oddballs, Zalygin's women, Panova's children—in a word, all the characters from contemporary Soviet literature represented in the anthology, are depicted from the standpoint of a rich, complex, many-sided aesthetic ideal. The fullness of human existence, the wealth and inexhaustible variety of the human personality, the high value placed on human life—all these add up to the ideal of contemporary Soviet Russian writers, no matter what their subject.

Soviet writers are unable to depict our own times without a profound interpretation of the recent past, without the

remembrance of the burden born by Soviet people all through the preceding years.

Poet and journalist Nikolai Gribachev wrote in his poem "I Do Not Want":

*No matter how much the wave of fashion has struck me,
No matter how much I've loved what was never before,
All that exists I consider through all that has been—
Plenty through famine, the times of peace through war.*

A great deal of Part Two covers the war with the German invaders. But whether the subject is the peasant family in the poetically radiant chapter from Abramov's tetralogy *Brothers and Sisters*, or Commissar Vorobyov and flier Alexei Meresyev in Boris Polevoi's *A Story About a Real Man*, or scientist Vikhrov in Leonid Leonov's novel *The Russian Forest*, we share not only the writers' distress that their remarkable heroes were deprived of so much, but their definite ideas on the nature of happiness and their pride in their characters who were always real people whatever the circumstances.

One of the special characteristics of contemporary Russian literature, as reflected in Part Two, is that it is at present being created by the members of every generation of Soviet writers: those who were present at its birth, those who began writing while going through the hell of war, and the young ones who have achieved proficiency not merely in the last few decades, but in the last few years. Each generation contributes its own experience and all gain accordingly, absorbing and digesting each other's experience.

In the introductory article to Part One, I mentioned the lives of certain Soviet writers of that period as typical of our whole society. I think that the biographical outlines given here will also make it possible to understand something essential about our contemporary society and, above all, to realise how rich and full-blooded it is.

Let us begin with Marietta Shaginyan, the doyenne of Soviet literature. She celebrated her ninetieth birthday in 1978. Her first poems saw the light when she was fifteen. When she was thirty-five, she brought out a series of political adventure stories. She was already past forty when she wrote *Hydrocentral*. One of the best Soviet novels, it gave an

artistic analysis of the growth of new relations between the people building socialist industry. When she was fifty, she defended, in the German language, her Candidate's dissertation on German literature. At sixty, she defended, in Ukrainian, her doctorate dissertation on Ukrainian literature. In 1972, when she was eighty-four, her many years of work on the subject of Lenin earned her the Lenin Prize, the highest award in the Soviet Union. Now, after her ninetieth birthday, Marietta Shaginyan is publishing a discursive work in diary form which shows amazing penetration of thought and vast erudition, and deals with a vast range of moral, philosophical and historical problems. She is also known as a translator from many Eastern and European languages.

Vassily Shukshin (1929-1974) was only forty-five when he died suddenly. He had been working on the part of a soldier in the film of Sholokhov's famous novel, *They Fought for Their Country*. He was a highly gifted actor, and it was primarily in films that he became famous. At thirty, however, he began directing, and as director-producer he attained world recognition, being awarded a series of top awards at international festivals. While working in films, Shukshin also achieved success as a writer. His short stories, fairy-tale fantasies and novels made his name popular and deeply loved everywhere. Shukshin's characters are people with restless, troubled minds. The main objects of his dislike and even hatred were the time-servers, the demagogues, the bureaucrats, people who were dead and indifferent inside.

Ivan Yefremov, a well-known science-fiction writer, switched to literature from science. He became a professor at thirty-three, his speciality being biology and mineralogy. His knowledge was encyclopaedic. He was equally at home with ancient history and the remote future. It is interesting to note that in one of his first adventure stories, "The Diamond Pipe", he predicted the existence of diamonds in Yakutia long before they were discovered there. His science-fiction and social-philosophical novel, *Andromeda*, gives a comprehensive picture of life in a highly developed communist society. Unhampered by the restrictions of narrow specialisation, his characters are versatile, harmonious, inspired to action by their high moral sense.

Another major contemporary Soviet writer was Konstantin Simonov—poet, journalist, novelist, playwright, script writer and public figure, extremely well known in our country. As a journalist, Simonov went with his notebook all the way from the beginning to the end of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. In the post-war years, he travelled almost all round the world and his poems and articles on various peoples and events always combined keenness of thought with a rare sincerity and a profoundly visual imagination. I think that the most important work written about the war is his trilogy, *The Living and the Dead, Not Born to Be Soldiers*, and *The Last Summer*. He managed to combine a profound understanding of the embattled people with a sweeping historical panorama.

In the 50s, a large group of gifted writers came to Soviet literature from the trials of war. Furthermore, there is reason to maintain that these writers are now the backbone of our literature; each brought to it his own unique individuality. Take Fyodor Abramov, undoubtedly one of our most talented prose writers. A Candidate of Philology, he once held a Chair in the Philological Faculty of Leningrad University and published work as a critic and literary scholar. However, in 1958 (he was then thirty-eight), his first novel, *Brothers and Sisters*, appeared in the magazine *Neva*. This proved to be the first of many thoughtful books about life in the north Russian countryside from the war up to our own days. Abramov now wants to call the whole tetralogy *Brothers and Sisters*, believing that this significant title sums up the content of all four books: the exploits of the people holding out in the immeasurably difficult conditions of war and post-war restoration thanks to mutual support, to a feeling of fraternal solidarity, to a highly developed conscience, to a feeling of duty to one's country and one's fellow villagers, to one's nearest and dearest, and to oneself. As a writer, Abramov is particularly interested in such crucial moral categories as conscience and human decency.

Needless to say, the few examples above do not exhaust the list of present-day writers. These scattered facts have been adduced purely to demonstrate that behind each work, whether poetry or prose, is the unconventional, vivid personality of its author, a man of his time and country.

The fullness of human existence as characteristic of Soviet

literature's aesthetic ideal has already been mentioned at the beginning of this article. But the fullness of human existence can also be considered relevant to the range of themes tackled by contemporary writers. There does not seem to be a single subject in one way or another to do with human existence and human life which has not been reflected in contemporary Russian literature. Man and his duty, man and love, man and his memories, man and his work, man and his people—such are the many facets of contemporary writing.

Man and nature: this vast topic is becoming more and more important in our literature. Leonid Leonov's *The Russian Forest* testifies how deeply the writer feels it and how complex is its relationship with the problems of social life and morality.

It is particularly necessary to mention the many books about the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. They all have the same theme in common of course—there is no chance of forgetting this or reason for doing so—and I myself am inclined to regard these books as a totality because they inevitably tackle the fundamental problems of human life. How could it be otherwise? After all, they are about the life and death of man; they describe the collision between social mainstays and world outlooks; they depict the exploit of the entire Soviet people and the fate of the inhuman nazi regime. The years and the decades pass, but each new generation attempts to interpret in its own way the memory of the last war. We are faced with what seems, at first glance, to be a remarkable phenomenon: in peacetime, the theme of war is the one being worked most intensively. The contradiction here, however, is purely superficial: the many contemporary works protesting against war that only brings death and destruction are a determined demonstration in support of peace. At the present time, there is no more serious and profound trend towards the defence of peace than these books; there is no writing which stresses so powerfully and so starkly the tragedy of human death. Heroism, fortitude, self-sacrifice, allegiance to duty—such are the first and paramount human attributes singled out by our writers in these books about war.

Highly indicative of our literature today is the upsurge of philosophical lyrics which try to penetrate to the very essence

of things, to see through the surface of phenomena into the meaning of the historical epoch. The title given by Lugovskoi to his cycle of poems, *The Middle of the Century*, is symbolic; it indicates the time scale chosen by the poet for commentary on the people and events of his stormy and contradictory era. The content of Zabolotsky's philosophical writings could aptly be described as a lofty philosophy of nature. Tvardovsky and Bergholtz reflect in their verse on the destiny of the people, their national uniqueness, their heroic deeds. I will not mention here all the poets represented in Part Two. I will merely stress that realism, a fundamental creative method in poetry (as in prose), in no way obstructs the romantic flow; the epic social canvases do not prevent the creation of individually coloured lyrical verse; the committed, politically impassioned poster style of verse rubs shoulders with the love song.

In contemporary Soviet literature, ideas and depth of philosophical interpretation are paramount in the development of historical-revolutionary themes. Soviet Leniniana have been supplemented with new and important books. It seems to me that in their works about Lenin, writers are becoming more and more preoccupied with the gigantic, intense and unceasing processes of his thought. We know, of course, Lenin the revolutionary, Lenin the democrat, Lenin the leader, Lenin the kind-hearted, simple man—these themes have never been absent from art and literature, and they never will; but special attention is now being devoted by Soviet writers to Lenin as a thinker. Marietta Shaginyan, for instance, has stressed that the study of Lenin allows us "to find in him a support for thinking, for conduct, for one's own growth (and man continues growing until death)". Delight at the daring of Lenin's thought, its depths, its dialectics is expressed with the utmost vividness in her analysis of Gorky's comparison of Lenin with Columbus. Here is how she sums up her reflections: "We must not grow old and become covered with a crust—there is still too much to be done on earth, it is too important to absorb the past with living excitement, because the past is still in a state of growth, it cannot be stopped in its course, it cannot be turned into a stamp and a model."

This anthology contains some of the gems in the treasury of Soviet Russian literature. The variety of styles and genres in

Soviet literature, all the colours of its spectrum, are represented here in miniature. Yet all who read this book will invariably hear the sincere voice of the Soviet citizen affirming the beauty of justice and goodness, intolerance of all violence, love for the man of toil and belief in his inexhaustible creative powers. I hope that these few works will stimulate the reader to turn again and again to a world hitherto unknown to him, the world of Soviet literature.

Prose

B. Polevoi



(b. 1908, Moscow)

The history of world literature shows that it is easier for a writer to create evil and negative characters than good and positive ones. The explanation for this will have to be found by the literary theorists. As far as Soviet writer Boris Polevoi is concerned, however, this law does not apply; on the contrary, the characters sympathetic to him turn out to be much more lifelike and convincing than those he dislikes or despises.

Boris Polevoi first appeared in print at a very early age, his first book, a collection of essays, coming out when the author was only nineteen. At twenty he was already a professional journalist. Polevoi served throughout the Great Patriotic War as a "Pravda" correspondent. The war years gave him an invaluable amount of copy and, indeed, this was when he met the fighter pilot A. T. Maresiev, Hero of the Soviet Union. This remarkable man was shot down in a dog-fight and for eighteen days and nights, though

wounded in both legs, made his way through the snowy forests back to his own side. He was operated on, lost his legs, and yet, with great determination and will-power, learnt to use artificial limbs so well that he was allowed to go back into action and continue operational flying. His life is the basis for the widely known **STORY OF A REAL MAN** (1946). The documentary approach is typical of Boris Polevoi's work, but it would be an unforgivable oversimplification to suppose that he writes what are merely documented narratives. In all truly creative work, there is profound generalisation underlying the external events, and so in this book by Boris Polevoi, its meaning is not exhausted by the story of a pilot displaying a heroic strength of character. Meresyev is a real man, but so is Commissar Vorobyov, his neighbour in the hospital ward who inspires his young comrade-in-arms with the will to live.

In the post-war years, Polevoi has published the novels **GOLD** (1950), **THE DEEP REAR** (1958), **ON THE WILD SHORE** (1962), **DOCTOR VERA** (1966), a book of articles, **THE FINAL RECKONING. NUREMBERG DIARIES**.

Since 1962, Boris Polevoi has been Editor-in-Chief of **YUNOST**, the most popular young people's magazine in the Soviet Union.

A Story About a Real Man

(An excerpt)

The appearance in ward number forty-two of the new patient, the Commissar, as they called him among themselves, changed the entire life of the ward. By the second day of his presence in it, this heavy and seriously wounded man had made friends with them all and, as Stepan Ivanovich put it later, had managed "to find a key to fit each one's heart".

With Stepan Ivanovich he talked to his heart's content about horses and hunting, of which both were very fond, and on which both were experts. With Meresyev, who was fond of philosophising about war, he argued vigorously about present-day methods of employing aircraft, tanks and cavalry and tried to prove, not without some heat, that while, of course, aircraft and tanks were very useful, the horse was not obsolete and would yet demonstrate its usefulness, and that if the cavalry were well remounted, and supported by tanks and artillery, and if a large number of bold and intelligent young officers were trained to assist the old veteran commanders, our cavalry would yet surprise the world. He even found subjects for conversation with the silent tankman. It turned out that the division in which he had served as Commissar had fought at Yartsevo and later had taken part in General Konev's counter-attack at Dukhovshchina, where the tankman and his group had broken out of a German ring. And the Commissar enthusiastically enumerated the villages they both knew, related how hot they had made it for the Germans, and where. The tankman kept silent, as usual, but he did not turn his head away when spoken to as he had done hitherto. His face could not be seen because of the bandages, but he nodded his head in agreement. Kukushkin's anger was converted into good humour the moment the Commissar invited him to play game of chess. The chess-board was placed on Kukushkin's bed and the Commissar played "blindfold", lying on his bed with his eyes shut. He beat the grumbling lieutenant hands down, and thereby rose immensely in the latter's estimation.

The effect of the Commissar's appearance in the ward was like the fresh, moist air of the early Moscow spring that blew into the ward in the morning when the maid opened the

windows, and when the oppressive silence was broken by the invasion of the many noises of the street. It cost the Commissar no effort to rouse this animation. He was simply full of life, boisterous, bubbling life, and forgot, or forced himself to forget, the torments caused by pain.

When he woke in the morning he sat up in bed and did his “jerks”—stretched both arms above his head, bent his body first to one side and then to the other, and rhythmically bent and turned his head. When water was taken round for washing, he insisted on having his as cold as possible, splashed and snorted over the bowl for a long time and then rubbed himself down with his towel with such vigour that his swollen body turned red; and watching him, the other patients longed to do the same. When the newspapers were brought in he eagerly snatched them from the nurse’s hand and hurriedly read the communiqué of the Soviet Information Bureau, and after that calmly and slowly read the reports of the war correspondents from the different fronts. He had a way of his own in reading, which might be called “active reading”. At one moment he would repeat in a whisper a passage in a report that pleased him and mutter “that’s right”, and mark the passage; or suddenly he would exclaim: “He’s lying, the son of a bitch! I bet my head to a beer bottle he was not near the place. The rascal! And yet he writes!” One day he got so angry over something a highly imaginative war correspondent had written that he at once wrote a postcard to the newspaper stating in irate terms that such things don’t and can’t happen in war, and requesting that some restraint be put on this “unmitigated liar”. At other times a report would set him thinking; he would lean back against his pillow with open eyes, lost in reflection, or else would tell some interesting story about his cavalry unit, every man of which, if he was to be believed, was a hero, “a downright brave lad”. And then he would start reading again. And strange as it may seem, these remarks of his, these lyrical digressions, did not divert the attention of his listeners, but, on the contrary, helped them better to understand what he read.

For two hours a day, between dinner and the medical treatments, he studied German, learnt words by heart, constructed sentences and sometimes, suddenly struck by the sounds of the foreign words, he would say:

“Do you know what ‘chicken’ is in German, boys?”

‘Küchelchen’. That sounds nice. You know, it gives you the impression of something tiny, fluffy and tender. And do you know what ‘little bell’ is? ‘Glöckling’. There’s a tinkle in that word, isn’t there?”

One day Stepan Ivanovich, unable to restrain himself, inquired:

“What do you want to learn German for, Comrade Commissar? You’re only tiring yourself uselessly. It would be better if you saved your strength...”

The Commissar looked at the old soldier slyly and said:

“Ekh, you greybeard! Is this a life for a Russian? In what language will I talk to the German girls in Berlin when we get there? In Russian?”

Sitting on the edge of the Commissar’s bed, Stepan Ivanovich wanted, quite reasonably, to answer that for the time being the fighting line was running not far from Moscow and that it was still a long way to the German girls, but there was such a ring of cheerful confidence in the Commissar’s voice that the old soldier coughed and answered seriously:

“No, not in Russian, of course. But still, Comrade Commissar, you ought to take care of yourself after what you have gone through.”

“The pampered horse is the first to come a cropper. Haven’t you heard that before? It’s bad advice you’re giving me, greybeard.”

None of the patients in the ward had a beard, but for some reason the Commissar called them all “greybeards”, and there was nothing offensive about the way he said it; on the contrary, it had had a ring of kindly humour and the patients felt soothed by it.

Alexei watched the Commissar for days on end, trying to fathom the source of his inexhaustible cheerfulness. There could be no doubt that he was enduring frightful suffering. As soon as he fell asleep and lost control of himself he began to moan, throw himself about and grind his teeth, while his face was contorted with pain. Evidently, he was aware of this and tried not to sleep in the day-time, always looking for something to do. But when awake he was always calm and even-tempered, as if he suffered no pain at all. He talked leisurely with the surgeons, cracked jokes when the latter tapped and examined the injured parts of his body, and only by the way his hand crumpled his bed sheet and by the beads

of perspiration that broke out on the bridge of his nose was it possible to guess how difficult it was for him to restrain himself. The airman could not understand how this man could suppress such frightful pain and muster such energy, cheerfulness and vivacity. Alexei was all the more keen on solving this riddle, for in spite of the increasing doses of drugs that he was getting he could no longer sleep at night, and sometimes lay with open eyes until morning, biting his blanket to suppress his groans.

More and more often and persistently during the surgeon's inspection he heard the sinister word "amputate". Feeling that the frightful day was approaching, Alexei decided that without feet life would not be worth living.

And that day came. On one of his visits Vassili Vassilyevich stood for a long time tapping Alexei's livid and totally insensitive feet and then, abruptly straightening his back and looking straight into Alexei's eyes, he said: "They must come off!" And before the airman, turning deathly pale, could utter a word, the professor repeated sternly: "They must come off! Not another word, do you hear? Otherwise you are done for! Do you understand me?"

He stalked out of the ward without even glancing at his retinue. An oppressive silence filled the ward. Meresyev lay with petrified face and wide-open eyes. Hovering before him, as if in a mist, were the livid, unsightly stumps of the old ferryman, and again he saw the latter crawling on the sand to the river like a monkey.

"Alexei," the Commissar called him softly.

"What?" answered Alexei in a distant, absent voice.

"You've got to, my boy."

In that instant it seemed to Alexei that it was not the ferryman but he himself who was crawling on stumps, and that his girl, his Olya, was standing on the sandy riverside in a bright-coloured frock blown about by the wind, light, radiant and beautiful, gazing at him intently and biting her lips. That's how it will be! And he broke into a fit of convulsive, silent weeping, burying his face in his pillow. Everybody in the ward was deeply affected. Stepan Ivanovich, grunting and groaning, got out of his bed, put on his robe and, shuffling his slippered feet and holding on to the bed rails, hobbled

towards Alexei's bed, but the Commissar held up a warning finger, as much as to say: "Don't interfere. Let him have a good cry."

And indeed, Alexei felt better after that. Soon he calmed down and even felt that relief a man always feels when he has, at last, settled a question that had been tormenting him for a long time. He uttered not a word until the evening, when the orderlies came to take him to the operating theatre. Nor did he utter a word in that dazzling white room. Even when he was told that the state of his heart would not permit his being put to sleep and that the operation would have to be performed under a local anaesthesia, he only nodded. During the operation he uttered neither a groan nor a cry. Several times Vassili Vassilyevich, who performed the simple operation himself and, as usual, growled angrily at the nurses and assistants, looked anxiously at the assistant who was watching Alexei's pulse.

When the bones were sawn the pain was frightful; but Alexei was now accustomed to bear pain, and he did not even understand what these people in white robes and with faces masked with white gauze were doing at his feet. When he was being carried back to the ward, however, he lost consciousness.

The first thing he saw when he came to was the sympathetic face of Klavdia Mikhailovna. Strangely enough, he remembered nothing, and he even wondered why the face of this good-looking, kind-hearted, fair-haired woman looked anxious and inquiring. Seeing that he had opened his eyes, her face beamed and she softly pressed his hand under the blanket.

"You've been simply splendid," she said, and at once took his wrist to feel his pulse.

"What's she talking about?" Alexei wondered. Then he felt a pain higher up the legs than before, and it was not the former burning, tearing, throbbing pain, but a dull ache, as if cords had been tied tightly below his knees. Suddenly he realised from the folds of the blanket that his body was shorter than it had been before, and in a flash he remembered: the dazzling white room, Vassili Vassilyevich's fierce growling, the dull thuds in the enamelled pail. "Already?" he wondered rather listlessly, and said to the nurse with a forced smile:

"It looks as though I have grown shorter."

It was a wry smile, more like a grimace. Klavdia Mikhailovna gently smoothed his hair and said:

"Never mind, dear, you'll feel easier now."

"Yes. Less weight to carry."

"Don't! Don't say that, dear! But you really have been splendid. Some shout, and some even have to be strapped down. But you did not make a sound. Oh, this horrible, horrible war!"

At this the angry voice of the Commissar was heard in the evening twilight:

"Stop your wailing, now! Give him these letters, nurse. Some fellows are lucky. Makes me envious. Fancy getting so many letters all at once!"

The Commissar handed Meresyev a batch of letters. They were from Alexei's wing; they bore different dates, but for some reason had been delivered at the same time. And now, lying with his feet amputated, Alexei read these friendly messages which told him of a life, far away, full of arduous labour, hardships and dangers, which drew him like a magnet, but which was now lost to him for ever. He eagerly read the big news and the minor events they wrote to him about from his wing.

...He was so absorbed with the contents of the letters that he did not notice the different dates, nor did he catch the Commissar winking to the nurse and pointing in his direction as he whispered to her: "My medicine is better than all your barbitals and veronals." Alexei never learned that, foreseeing this contingency, the Commissar had withheld some letters from him in order to mitigate the terrible blow by letting him read the friendly greetings and news from his beloved airfield. The Commissar was an old soldier. He knew the value of these hurriedly and carelessly written scraps of paper, which, at the front, are sometimes more precious than medicine or bread...

After the operation the worst that can happen to a man in such circumstances happened to Alexei Meresyev—he withdrew into himself. He did not complain, he did not weep, he was never irritable. He just kept silent.

For whole days he lay motionless on his back, his eyes concentrated on the winding crack in the ceiling. When his wardmates spoke to him he answered "yes" or "no", often inappropriately, and fell silent again, staring at a dark crack in the plaster as if it were a hieroglyph, the deciphering of which meant salvation for him. He obediently carried out all the doctor's orders, took everything he prescribed for him, ate his dinner listlessly, without zest, and stretched out on his back again.

"Hey, greybeard!" the Commissar called. "What are you thinking about?"

Alexei turned his head in the Commissar's direction and looked at him with a blank stare as if he did not see him.

"What are you thinking about, I'm asking you?"

"Nothing."

One day Vassili Vassilyevich came into the ward and asked him in his customary bluff manner:

"Well, crawler, are you alive? How's things? You are a hero, a hero, I say. You didn't even murmur. Now I can believe that you crawled on all fours for eighteen days, getting away from the Germans. I have operated on more people in my time than the number of potatoes you've eaten, but I've never operated on a fellow like you." The professor rubbed his hands; they were red and peeling and the finger-nails were corroded. "What are you scowling for? I praise him, but he scowls! I am a lieutenant-general in the Medical Corps. I order you to smile!"

Stretching his lips with difficulty into a vacant, rubber smile, Meresyev thought: "If I knew it would end like this, I wouldn't have taken the trouble to crawl. I had three bullets left in my pistol."

In one of the newspapers the Commissar read a war correspondent's description of an interesting battle. Six of our fighter planes engaged twenty-two German planes, brought down eight and lost only one. The Commissar read this story with such zest that one would have thought that it was not airmen he did not know, but his own cavalymen that had distinguished themselves. Even Kukushkin showed enthusiasm in the argument that ensued, when each tried to picture how it had all happened. But Alexei lay and thought: "Lucky fellows, they are flying and fighting, but I will never go up again."

The communiqués of the Soviet Information Bureau became more and more laconic. All the signs went to show that somewhere in the rear of the Soviet Army a mighty force was being mustered for another blow. The Commissar and Stepan Ivanovich gravely discussed where that blow would be struck and what effect it would have upon the Germans. Only recently Alexei had led conversations like that; now he tried not to listen to them. He too sensed the approach of big developments of gigantic and, perhaps, decisive battles. But the thought that his comrades, probably even Kukushkin who was rapidly recovering, would take part in those battles, while he was doomed to vegetate in the rear, that nothing could be done about it, was so bitter to him that when the Commissar read the newspaper, or when a conversation about the war commenced, Alexei covered his head with his blanket and rubbed his cheeks on his pillow in order not to see and not to hear. And for some reason the familiar line from Maxim Gorky's *Song of the Falcon* kept running through his mind: "Those who are born to creep cannot fly."

Klavdia Mikhailovna brought in a few sprigs of pussy-willow—how they got into stern, wartime, barricaded Moscow heaven knows—and placed a sprig in a glass at each bedside. The reddish sprigs and white, fluffy balls smelt so fresh that it seemed as though spring itself had come into ward forty-two. That day everybody felt joy and animation. Even the silent tankman mumbled a few words through his bandages.

Alexei lay and reflected: In Kamyshin, turbid streams are running down the muddy sidewalks into the glistening, cobble-stoned road, there is a smell of warmed earth, fresh dampness and horse dung. It was on a day like this that he and Olya had stood on the steep bank of the Volga and the ice had floated smoothly past them on the limitless expanse of the river amidst a solemn silence, broken only by the silver, bell-like strains of the larks. And it had seemed as though it was not the ice that was floating with the stream, but he and Olya, who were noiselessly floating to meet a stormy, choppy river. They had stood there without saying a word, dreaming dreams of such future happiness that in that spot overlooking the wide expanse of the Volga, in the freely blowing breezes of the spring, they had struggled for breath. Those dreams would never come true, now. She will turn away from him.

And even if she does not, can he accept this sacrifice, can he permit her, so bright and fair and graceful, to walk by his side while he hobbled along on stumps?... And he begged the nurse to remove the naive harbinger of spring from his bedside.

The sprig of willow was removed, but he could not so easily rid himself of his bitter reflections: What will Olya say when she learns that he has lost his feet? Will she leave him, obliterate him from her life? His whole being protested against this. No! She is not like that! She will not throw him up, will not turn away from him! But that would be even worse. He pictured to himself her marrying him from an impulse of her noble heart, marrying him, a cripple, and for his sake giving up her dream of a higher technical education, harnessing herself to office drudgery to keep herself, a crippled husband and, perhaps, who knows, even children.

Had he the right to accept such a sacrifice? They were not bound to each other yet, they were engaged, but not yet husband and wife. He loved her, loved her dearly, and therefore decided that he had no such right, that he himself must sever their ties, at once, at one stroke, in order to save her not only from a burdensome future, but also from the torments of a present dilemma.

But then a letter arrived bearing the Kamyshin postmark, and it upset all these decisions. It was a letter from Olya, and every line breathed anxiety. As if labouring under a foreboding of disaster, she wrote that she would remain with him for ever, no matter what happened to him, that she lived only for him, that her thoughts were with him every spare moment, and that these thoughts helped her to bear the hardships of war-time, the sleepless nights at the factory, the digging of trenches and tank ditches on free days and nights, and, why conceal it, her existence of semi-starvation. "That last small photograph with you sitting on a tree stump with a dog and smiling, is always with me. I have put it in Mother's locket and wear it round my neck. When I feel depressed I open the locket and look at you... I believe that as long as we love each other, we need fear nothing." She also wrote that his mother had been very anxious about him lately, and again urged him to write to the old lady more often, but not to disquiet her with bad news.

These letters from home had always been a happy event, an

event that had warmed his heart amidst the hardships of life at the front; but now, for the first time, they gave him no joy. They made his heart heavier and he committed the blunder that caused him so much torment later: he dared not write home to say that his feet had been amputated...

Alexei Meresyev spent his monotonous days at the hospital in bitter reflection. And although his iron constitution had borne the skilfully performed amputation easily and the wounds healed quickly, he grew perceptibly weaker, and in spite of all the measures taken to counteract this, everybody saw that he was pining away and wasting more and more every day.

Meanwhile, spring was surging outside.

It forced itself into ward forty-two, into this room that reeked of iodoform. It came through the window, bringing the cool, humid breath of melting snow, the excited twittering of the sparrows, the merry, ringing whoop of the street-cars as they turned the corner, the resounding footsteps on the now snow-free asphalt and, in the evening—the low, monotonous strains of an accordion. It peeped through the side window out of which could be seen a sunlit branch of a poplar-tree on which longish buds covered with a yellowish gum were swelling. It came into the ward in the form of the golden freckles on the kind, pale face of Klavdia Mikhailovna, defying every type of face powder, and causing the nurse no little annoyance. It persistently drew attention to itself by the merry drumming of heavy drops of moisture on the tin-covered outside windowsills.

As always, the spring softened hearts and awakened dreams.

...Kukushkin had had his splints removed. Stepan Ivanovich was learning to walk without crutches and could already move about fairly upright. He now spent whole days at the window, watching what was going on in the “wide world”. Only the Commissar and Meresyev grew steadily worse as the days passed by. This was particularly the case with the Commissar. He could no longer do his morning jerks. His body assumed a sinister, yellowish, almost transparent bloatedness. He bent his arms with difficulty and he could no longer hold a pencil or a spoon.

In the morning the ward maid washed him and fed him, and one could see that it was not the severe pain but this helplessness that was depressing and tormenting him most.

But he did not become despondent. His bass boomed just as cheerfully as before, he read the newspapers with his former zest and even continued to study German; but he was no longer able to hold his books when reading, so Stepan Ivanovich made him a wire book-rest and would sit at his bedside to turn the pages over for him. In the morning, before the newspapers came, the Commissar would eagerly ask the nurse what the last communiqué was, what news had been given over the radio, what the weather was like, and what was heard in Moscow. He obtained Vassili Vassilyevich's permission to have a radio set extension fixed at his bedside.

It seemed as though the feebler his body grew the stronger became his spirit. He continued to read the numerous letters he received with unflagging interest and to answer them, dictating to Kukushkin and to Gvozdev in turn. One day Meresyev was dozing after taking some treatment, but was aroused by the Commissar's thundering bass voice.

On the wire book-rest lay a copy of the divisional newspaper which, in spite of the stamped order: "Not to be taken away", somebody sent him regularly.

"Have they gone crazy out there, or what, while on the defensive?" he roared. "Kravtsov a bureaucrat? The best veterinary surgeon in the army a bureaucrat? Grisha, take this down at once."

And he dictated to Gvozdev an irate letter to a member of the Army Military Council requesting that restraint be put on the newspapermen who had undeservedly thrown discredit upon a good and zealous officer. He continued to scold "those pen-pushers" even after he had given the nurse the letter to post, and it was strange to hear those words of passion from a man who could not even turn his head on his pillow.

That evening something more remarkable happened. In that quiet hour when the lights were not yet on and the shadows were beginning to darken in the corners of the room, Stepan Ivanovich was sitting at the window, thoughtfully gazing at the embankment. Some women in canvas aprons were cutting ice on the river. They hacked long strips of ice with crow-bars from the edge of a dark, square ice hole, broke the strips into oblong blocks with one or two strokes of their bars, and then, with the aid of boat-hooks, dragged these blocks up the wooden boards out of the water. The blocks lay in rows—greenish and

transparent below and yellow and crumbling on top. A long train of sleighs, tied one behind the other, trailed along the river-bank to where the ice was being cut. An old man wearing an ear-flapped cap, wadded trousers and a coat of the same kind girdled with a belt from which hung an axe, led the horses to where the ice was lying, and the women loaded the ice blocks on the sleighs.

Stepan Ivanovich's experienced eye told him that the work was being done by a collective-farm team but was badly organised. There were too many people on the job and they only got into each other's way. A plan of operations arose in his practical mind. He mentally divided the team into groups of three—enough to drag the ice blocks out of the water without difficulty. He then assigned each group to a definite section and fixed the pay not at a round sum for the whole team, but for each group separately, according to the number of blocks they hauled. He saw an active, round-faced, rosy-cheeked young woman in the team and he mentally suggested to her that she should initiate socialist emulation among the groups... He was so absorbed in his reflections that he did not see one of the horses go so near to the edge of the ice hole that its hind legs slipped, and it fell into the water. The weight of the sleigh kept the horse on the surface, but the swiftness of the current was pulling it under the ice. The old man with the axe fussed helplessly, now dragging at the rail of the sleigh and now tugging at the horse's bridle.

Stepan Ivanovich gasped and shouted at the top of his voice: "The horse is drowning!"

The Commissar, with an incredible effort, his face going ashen-grey from pain, rose up on his elbow and, leaning his chest on the windowsill, looked out and whispered: "The blockhead! Doesn't he understand? The traces!... Cut the traces! The horse will get out by itself. He'll kill the beast!"

Clumsily, Stepan Ivanovich clambered on to the windowsill. The horse was drowning. The turbid water was already splashing over it, but it was making desperate efforts to get out and dug its iron-shod forehoofs into the edge of the ice.

"Cut the traces!" shouted the Commissar, as if the old man on the river could hear him.

Stepan Ivanovich made a megaphone with his hands and through the ventilating pane shouted the Commissar's advice across the street:

“Hey! Old man! Cut the traces! You’ve got an axe in your belt—cut the traces, hack them!”

The old man heard this, what seemed to him heaven-sent advice. He snatched the axe from his belt and cut the traces with a couple of strokes. Released from harness, the horse at once clambered on to the ice, stood away from the edge of the ice hole and, panting, shook itself like a dog.

“What’s the meaning of this?” a voice demanded at this moment.

Vassili Vassilyevich, with his smock unbuttoned and without the white skull-cap he usually wore, was standing at the door. He flew into a towering rage, stamped his foot and would hear no explanations. He said the ward had gone mad, that he would send them all to the devil out of here, and went out panting and upbraiding everybody without having ascertained what had really happened. A few moments later Klavdia Mikhailovna came into the ward with tearstained face and looking very much upset. She had just received a severe dressing-down from Vassili Vassilyevich, but she caught sight of the ashen-grey, lifeless face of the Commissar who was lying motionless with eyes shut, and rushed to him.

In the evening the Commissar felt very ill. They gave him an injection of camphor, and then they gave him oxygen, but he remained unconscious for a long time. The moment he came to, however, he tried to smile at Klavdia Mikhailovna, who was standing over him with the oxygen bag.

“Don’t worry, nurse, I’ll come back even from hell to bring you the stuff the devils use to get rid of freckles.”

It was terrible to watch this big, powerful man growing feebler every day in the fierce struggle he was waging against his infirmity.

Meresyev too grew weaker with every passing day...

The Commissar was able to find a key to fit every heart, but so far he had not been able to find one to fit Meresyev’s. On the day after he underwent his operation, Ostrovsky’s *How the Steel Was Tempered* appeared in the ward. The book was read aloud. Alexei realised that this reading was meant for him, but the story brought him little comfort. Pavel Korchagin had been one of his boyhood heroes. “But Korchagin was not an airman,” Alexei reflected now. “Did he know what

‘yearning for the air’ means? Ostrovsky did not write his books in bed at a time when all the men and many women of the country were fighting, when even snotty-nosed boys, standing on crates because they were not tall enough to reach the lathes, were turning shells.”

To put it short, on this occasion the book was not a success. So the Commissar tried a flanking movement. Casually, he began to tell the story of another man whose legs were paralysed, and who held a big public post in spite of that. Stepan Ivanovich, who was interested in everything that happened in the world, gasped with astonishment, and remembered that where he came from there was a doctor who only had one arm, but was for all that the best doctor in the district, rode a horse, loved to go hunting and handled a gun so expertly that he could hit a squirrel in the eye. Here the Commissar recalled the late Academician Williams, whom he had known personally. That man was half paralysed, could use only one arm, and yet he directed the work of the Agricultural Institute and conducted research on a vast scale.

Meresyev listened and smiled: it is possible to think, to talk, to write, issue orders, heal people and even go hunting without legs, but he was an airman, a born airman, an airman since boyhood, from the day on which—when guarding the melon field where among the limp leaves on the cracked earth lay enormous striped melons that were famous up and down the Volga—he heard, and then saw, a small silvery dragonfly, its double wings glistening in the sun, gliding slowly over the dusty steppe somewhere in the direction of Stalingrad.

From that moment the dream of becoming an airman had never left him. His mind was filled with it during the lessons at school, and later, when he operated a lathe in a factory. At night, when everybody was asleep, he and the famous airman Lyapidevsky found and rescued the Chelyuskin expedition, and with Vodopyanov he landed heavy aircraft on the pack ice at the North Pole, and with Chkalov opened the unexplored air route to the United States across the Pole.

The Young Communist League sent him to the Far East and there he helped to build the city of youth in the taiga—Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur—but he carried his dream of flying even to that distant place. Among the builders of the city, he found young men and women who, like himself, dreamed of flying, and it was hard to believe that with their

own hands they actually built an air club for themselves in that city, which in those days existed only in blueprints. In the evenings, when mist enveloped the huge construction project, the builders would withdraw into their barracks, close the windows and light smoky fires of damp twigs outside the doors to drive away the swarms of mosquitoes and gnats which filled the air with a sinister, high-pitched buzzing. At that hour, when all the other builders were resting after the day's labours, the members of the air club, led by Alexei, their bodies smeared with kerosene which was supposed to keep the mosquitoes and gnats away, went into the taiga with axes, picks, saws, spades and T.N.T. There they felled trees, blew up tree stumps and levelled the ground to win space from the taiga for an airfield. And they won this space, tearing several kilometres out of the virgin forest.

It was from that airfield that Alexei soared into the air for the first time in a training craft, at last realising the dream of his boyhood.

Later, he studied at an army aviation school and became an instructor himself. He was at this school when the war broke out. In spite of the opposition of the school authorities he gave up his job and joined the army. His whole object in life, all his interests, joys, plans for the future, and all his successes were bound up with aviation.

And yet they talked to him about Williams.

"But Williams was not an airman," said Alexei, and turned to the wall.

But the Commissar persevered in his efforts to "unlock" him. One day, when he was in his usual stupor, Alexei heard the Commissar say:

"Alexei! Read this. It's about you."

Stepan Ivanovich was already carrying the magazine to Meresyev. It contained a short article marked with a pencil. Alexei ran his eye down the page looking for his own name, but did not find it. It was an article about Russian airmen of the First World War. Gazing at him from the page of the magazine was the unknown face of a young officer with a short moustache twisted to fine points, and wearing a forage-cap with a white cockade on one side of his head so that it touched his ear.

"Read it, read it, it was written for you," the Commissar urged.

Meresyev read the article. It was about a Russian army airman, Lieutenant Valerian Karpovich, who was hit in the foot by a German dum dum bullet while flying over the enemy's lines. In spite of his shattered foot, he managed to take his "Farman" across the lines and land at his base. The foot was amputated, but the young officer wanted to stay in the army. He invented an artificial foot and had it made from his own designs. He trained perseveringly for a long time and, as a result, returned to the army towards the end of the war. He was appointed inspector at an army aviation school and, as was stated in the article, "sometimes risked a flight in his aircraft". He was awarded the officer's St. George Cross and stayed in the Air Force until he was killed in a crash.

Meresyev read the article once, twice and a third time. The lean, young lieutenant with the tired but determined face gazed at him with a rather strained but, on the whole, gallant smile. Meanwhile, the entire ward tensely watched Alexei. He ran his fingers through his hair; keeping his eyes glued to the magazine he groped for a pencil on his night table and with deliberate strokes traced a square around the article.

"Have you read it?" inquired the Commissar with a sly look in his eyes. Alexei remained silent, his eyes still scanning the lines of the article. "Well, what do you say?"

"But he only lost a foot."

"But you are a Soviet airman."

"He flew a 'Farman'. It wasn't much of a plane. A whatnot, rather. It was simple to fly. No technique or speed was needed."

"But you are a Soviet airman!" the Commissar persisted.

"A Soviet airman," Alexei repeated mechanically, still staring at the article. Then his face lit up with some sort of an inner light and he looked at each of his fellow-patients in turn with eyes filled with joy and wonder.

That night Alexei put the magazine under his pillow and remembered that in childhood, when he climbed into the bunk he shared with his brothers, he used to hide in much the same way an ugly little Teddy bear his mother had made for him out of an old plush jacket. He laughed loudly at this recollection.

He did not sleep a wink that night. The ward was wrapped in heavy slumber. Gvozdev tossed about on his bed, causing the mattress springs to twang. Stepan Ivanovich snored with a whistle as if his insides were bursting to get out. Now and

again the Commissar turned over, uttering a low groan through clenched teeth. But Alexei heard nothing. Every once in a while he pulled the magazine out from under his pillow and by the light of the night-lamp gazed at the smiling face of the lieutenant. "You had a hard job, but you pulled it off," he mused. "Mine is ten times harder, but I'll pull it off too, you'll see!"

In the middle of the night, the Commissar suddenly lay quite still. Alexei raised himself on his elbow and saw him lying pale and calm, seeming not to breathe. He seized the bell and rang furiously. Klavdia Mikhailovna ran into the ward, bare-headed, with sleepy eyes and her plait hanging down her back. A few moments later the house surgeon was called. He felt the Commissar's pulse, gave him a camphor injection and put the nozzle of the oxygen bag to his mouth. The surgeon and the nurse busied themselves around the patient for about an hour, seemingly without avail. At last the Commissar opened his eyes, smiled feebly, almost imperceptibly, at Klavdia Mikhailovna and said softly:

"I'm sorry I gave you all this trouble for nothing. I didn't reach hell, and haven't brought you the stuff for your freckles. So you will have to put up with them, my dear. It can't be helped."

The jest made everybody breathe with relief. A stout oak that man was, and perhaps he would withstand even such a storm as this. The house surgeon left the ward, the squeaking of his shoes slowly dying in the corridor, the ward maids also went away, and only Klavdia Mikhailovna remained. She sat sideways on the edge of the Commissar's bed. The patients fell asleep again, except for Meresyev, who lay with eyes shut, thinking of artificial feet that could be attached to the pedals of his aircraft, even if it were with straps. He remembered the instructor at the air club speak about a Civil War airman who had short legs and had small blocks of wood attached to the pedals of his machine in order to be able to reach them.

"I'll be as good as you, my lad," he kept on assuring Karpovich. And the words "I will fly, I will fly" rang joyously in his mind, driving away sleep. He lay quiet with his eyes shut. Looking at him, one might have thought that he was deep in slumber and smiling in his sleep.

And lying there, he heard a conversation which he later

recalled on more than one occasion during difficult moments.

"Oh, but why do you behave like that? I think it is terrible to laugh and joke when you are in such pain. My heart freezes when I think of the suffering you are going through. Why don't you want to go into a separate ward?"

It sounded as though it was not the kind and pretty but seemingly passionless nurse Klavdia Mikhailovna who was speaking, but a woman, ardent and protesting, and her voice expressed grief and, perhaps, something else besides. Meresyev opened his eyes. In the light of the night-lamp that was shaded with a kerchief, he saw the Commissar's pale, swollen face against the background of his pillow, his kind, flashing eyes, and the soft, feminine profile of the nurse. The light falling against the back of her head made her soft, fair hair shine like a halo, and Meresyev, although conscious that this was not the right thing to do, could not tear his eyes away from her.

"Now, now, little nurse, you mustn't cry! Shall we give you some bromide?" said the Commissar, as if speaking to a little girl.

"There! You are joking again! What an awful man you are! It is monstrous, really monstrous to laugh when one ought to cry, to soothe others when one's own body is being rent with pain. My dear, dear good man, don't dare, do you hear, don't dare behave like that any more!"

She lowered her head and wept silently. With sad, kindly eyes the Commissar gazed at her thin, white-robed, shuddering shoulders.

"It's too late, too late my dear," he said. "I have always been scandalously late in my own private affairs. I was always too busy with other things. And now, I think, I am too late altogether."

The Commissar sighed. The nurse raised her head and looked at him with eyes filled with tears and eager expectation. He smiled, sighed again and, in his customary kindly and slightly jocular tone, continued:

"Listen to this story, my clever little girl. I have just remembered it. It happened a long time ago, during the Civil War, in Turkestan. Yes. A cavalry squadron went in such hot pursuit of the *basmachi* that before long it found itself in a desert so wild that the horses dropped dead, one after another. They were Russian horses and not used to the sandy

desert. So from cavalry we were converted into infantry. The Squadron Commander decided to abandon all baggage and, carrying nothing but weapons, make for the nearest big city. It was a hundred and sixty kilometres away, and we had to march across bare sand. Can you picture it, little girl? We marched one day, two days, three days. The sun was scorching hot. We had no water. Our mouths were so parched that the skin cracked. The air was full of sand, sand crunched under our feet, gritted in our teeth, pricked our eyes, blew down our throats. It was horrible, I tell you! If a man stumbled and fell, he would lie face downwards in the sand unable to get up. We had a Commissar, a chap called Yakov Pavlovich Volodin. A flabby intellectual by the look of him—he was an historian. But he was a staunch Bolshevik. One would think that he would have been the first to drop, but he kept on, and encouraged the others. ‘Not far to go now. We’ll be there soon,’ he would keep on repeating; and if anybody lay down he would level his pistol at him and say: ‘Get up, or I’ll shoot!’

“On the fourth day, when we were only about fifteen kilometres from the city, the men were completely played out. We staggered along as if we were drunk, and the trail we left zigzagged like that of a wounded animal. Suddenly the Commissar started a song. He had an awful, thin voice and the song he started was silly, the marching song they used to sing in the old army, but we all chimed in and sang it. I gave the order: ‘Fall into line!’ and had the men march in step. You wouldn’t believe it, but the going became easier.

“After this song we sang another, and then a third. Can you picture it, little girl? We sang with dry, cracked mouths, and in such a scorching heat! We sang all the songs we knew and at last arrived, without leaving a single man in the desert... What do you think of that?”

“What about the Commissar?”

“What about him? He’s alive and well. He’s a professor of archaeology. Digs up prehistoric settlements. True, that march cost him his voice. Speaks in a hoarse whisper. But what does he want a voice for?... Well, no more stories tonight. Go along, little girl, I give you my word as a cavalryman not to die any more tonight.”...

Translated by Joe Fineberg

K. Fedin

(b. 1892, Saratov—d. 1977,
Moscow)

The work of Konstantin Fedin, member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, was at all times remarkable for its high analytical quality, for the desire to fathom out the complex issues placed before mankind by the turbulent events of the first half of this century.

*The outbreak of the First World War found him in Germany where he had gone to perfect his German. Throughout the war he remained in Nuremberg as a civilian internee. These hard years left in Fedin lasting disgust for militarism and philistine mentality. Back home, he wrote for the Bolshevik press. In 1924 Fedin published his *CITIES AND YEARS*, one of the first Soviet novels. In this vivid and compositionally unusual book he drew extensively on his rich experience of life. Russia and Germany, intellectuals in despair and revolutionary soldiers intensely aware of the importance of freedom at a time of nationwide upheaval, hereditary German aristocrats and Russians from the lowest walks*

of life—all these people found themselves involved in a maelstrom of revolutionary reality, and all of them revealed their most essential features.

Konstantin Fedin followed this novel with stories and novels, which evinced his keen and profound insight into human psychology of the turbulent times of revolution. The place of the intellectual in popular life was the key theme of most of his works.

During the Second World War he started work on his trilogy *EARLY JOYS* (1945), *NO ORDINARY SUMMER* (1948), and *THE CONFLAGRATION* (which remained unfinished) spanning the period from before the Revolution to the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. Against a broad background of historical events Fedin traces the emergence of a Russian revolutionary intellectual. The underlying message of the first two novels of the trilogy is the need for a revolutionary renovation of Russia.

Kirill Izvekov, one of the main characters of the trilogy, matures into a really great personality in the struggle for the revolutionary transformation of the world. Alexander Pastukhov is another central character of the work. A talented playwright, he sets his course through life "at a tangent", as it were, to the major events of his time. He always manages to take up a position which seems to put his personal life and creative destiny outside the cataclysms of history.

But, he was yet to encounter reversals capable of piercing the outwardly impenetrable mental panoply of this clever and cynical man. Such was the war against nazi Germany, which brought terrible calamities upon all our people. Pastukhov had long since been estranged from his son, fate had charted them different destinies, but they meet by chance just before his son rejoins his unit on the fighting front, and one common feeling—of pain and alarm for the country—unites them. For they are certain that “no one will manage to tear out our heart. It’s too big!”

Konstantin Fedin died in 1977, his trilogy unfinished. Scholars who have studied his archives say that the chapters the great writer left on his desk show the ultimate fate of Pastukhov: driven by the impulse that moved all the nation he joined the volunteer corps and met his death in a desperate engagement at Tula, redeeming the cold-blooded egoism of his life.

Fedin left us a great and diverse legacy. His contribution to Soviet and world culture is considerable. The principles of his writing are a model for writers of future generations.

The Conflagration

(An excerpt)

It was one of those quiet and dusky mornings when the air seems flecked with lingering wisps of fog and the light has not altogether dispelled the recent haze of the cool dawn.

Walking out of the station and asking the way, Pastukhov threw his coat over his shoulders. Having decided beforehand not to hurry, he now walked through the forest, peering at the dense growth of trees with that slow gaze of his which he himself knew so well, and which, taking in the entire expanse of his field of vision, was able to sift separate curious details out of it.

He wanted everything to impress itself on him gradually, he wanted to walk step by step into the world which awaited him like someone climbing up to a historical palace, from one flight of stairs onto another, viewing and taking in every spiral flight, and the passages leading from hall to hall, and the murals, until, having passed the halls of ceremonies, he reaches the heart of all suites—the private quarters of the man who had built this palace and left behind its glory for future generations. And just as every object in a palace carries the imagination back to times of long ago, when the object had not yet attracted hordes of strangers gaping at it in amazement, but was simply in the service of its ruler's household, so here, in the silence of the forest's shadows, every moss-covered stump by the road or rotten sawed-up aspen led Pastukhov's thoughts on and on from one dimension of time into another.

The abatis forest, still mighty and little touched by the hand of man, stood motionless at this hour of day. The trees could have been said to be gloomy and soundless were it not for those streaks of fog-speckled light boring through the gloom and for the brief call of birds, now nearby, now further away, piercing the silence from time to time. Stopping for a while to concentrate on their voices, Pastukhov smiled at his surmise: the birds were not singing but chirping in a businesslike manner, without any superfluous trills—they called to one another only when it was necessary, and were the traveller suddenly to stop, a bird concealed somewhere in the thick of the high crowns would quickly pipe out, "He's stopped! He's

stopped!" Pastukhov went on. It grew silent again. He stopped, and the chirping resumed: "He's stopped", and some other businesslike piper would query from afar, "Again?" And the bird would answer, "Again...!"

Pastukhov pictured quite clearly in his mind a similar scene of birds exchanging calls of alarm in the morning silence just like this three or four centuries ago, when human voices reached this place from afar, and then an abrupt thump of steel against wood carried through the forest, followed by another and yet another, and suddenly hundreds of such thumps shook the entire forest with the staccato thudding of trees being felled. The axes fell harder and harder, the earth groaned beneath the topping forest giants, and the sound of twigs and branches snapping under the trunks rose higher and higher like a wild conflagration. An abatis was being built against a marauding Tatar host, and verst upon verst, from Plava to Upa, centuries-old trees, their sharpened tops facing south, were felled to form the impenetrable wall of a defensive blockage. The capital city of Moscow sent levies to its trusty southern forts to help the abatis guards, and peasants armed with axes forged in Tula hurried in the wake of the irregulars to fell oak and birch in the forest. Fur-bearing animals fled from the clamour, the elk bolted, the wolf slunk away, and only the little birds, invisible in the foliage, remained to exchange their frightened, "Again?"—"Again."

"Well now, the levies and peasants did not disgrace the Moscow state," Pastukhov thought, "they stood up for themselves with their poleaxes and hatchets. Surely they'll make a good stand this time as well?"

He stopped in his tracks again, listening.

The calm was so complete it seemed that raids and battles, ruin and destruction were something from fairy tales only, while real life had always been just like this forest and the sky above it—as still as the balanced pans of scales. But even this stationary scene seemed to have been taken out of a fairy tale, and everywhere he looked, Pastukhov seemed to see pictures from his own childhood fantasy world of a fairy kingdom, through whose forests wanders a stranger guided by the birds to a cottage hidden in a dense thicket.

As Pastukhov recalled this he began making up a fairy tale of his own...

...In a secluded cottage there lived a righteous man, and whosoever found his cottage and asked him a question would receive an answer right there and then. A stranger stumbled through the forest for the whole of one day, and another, and a little bird chirped to him, "Turn right." The man turned to the right and lo and behold! Sitting on a stump in the middle of a clearing was an old man weaving bast shoes. "Greetings," says the stranger. "Aren't you the righteous man who lives in the secluded cottage?" "All my life I wanted to be righteous," says the man, "but whether I am righteous or not is not for me to judge. My cottage, though, is not secluded, but stands like a tree-stump amid a lea, and whoever looks for it will find it." "So it must be you after all," says the stranger and asks, "I've come to ask you a question to see whether you give me the answer to it or not?" To which the old man replies, "Whatever you've come for you'll get, so ask away." "Do you know," says the stranger, "that in this wide world there is a war going on, of a vastness unknown since the beginning of time?" "I know," says the old man. "So tell me now," says the stranger, "be so kind and tell me the possible outcome of this war?" At this the righteous old man looked deeply into the eyes of the stranger and suddenly, without uttering a word, laughter burst out of his toothless mouth making his beard shake and the bast shoes and paring knife bob up and down in his hands. No sooner did the stranger hear the old man erupt in a gale of laughter, baring his toothless mouth, his eyes fixed on the stranger's, than he realised that the old man had seen right through him. And fear gripped his heart...

At this point of the fairy tale Pastukhov came out into a round green clearing, the sight of which surprised him so much that his eyes involuntarily started to look for the stump, and he, like the stranger in that fairy tale, was also gripped by fear.

"My God, the things one fancies," he mumbled with a wry smile, and although the smile was forced, it did not fade from his plump lips for a long time. An urban dweller that he was, he started looking round to see whether he had not lost his way and realised that the road had really disappeared; that

instant an almost childish fear stirred in him: had he perhaps lost his way after all?

"Now, you've got the wind up for nothing?" he said to himself with the same smile, cheering himself up, ashamed of that unpleasant feeling.

He turned back, but soon realised that he was getting deeper into the forest and swiftly returned to the clearing. He looked at his watch, figured out that he should have covered a good distance by now, and was rather surprised not to have met a single living soul on his way. No sooner did this thought cross his mind than a teenage girl in a red dress and with shoes dangling from a string across her shoulder stepped out into the clearing and stopped abruptly, turning on Pastukhov her bright, honey-colored eyes.

"Got scared?" he asked her as kindly as possible, feeling relieved for all that he himself had been startled a bit.

"No," she answered quietly, adding in a still lower tone, "and who are you?"

The sun, already high in the sky, bathed her in its light, and her bright red dress stood out garishly against the equally bright green of the clearing, but nonetheless these clashing colours seemed to find a rapport with each other and were wonderful to behold. She still gazed levelly at him.

"You see... I've fallen behind my excursion group," he lied for no obvious reason. "How do I get to Yasnaya?"

"That way, straight on," replied the girl, pointing her thumb behind her back over the dangling shoes.

"And where could you be going? Are you from these parts?"

"I'm going not far," she said, suddenly dropping her eyes to the ground.

"Well, how are things in Yasnaya?" he said at length more out of politeness, and made a step towards her.

"How can they be?" she returned the query, her eyes still fixed on the ground. "Like everywhere else."

"And how is it everywhere else?" he asked jokingly.

The girl gave him a quick, hostile glance, dropped her eyes again and, starting with a jerk, made her way along the edge of the clearing. Raising her bare feet high above the grass and giving him a wide berth, she suddenly turned into the forest and the next thing he saw was her breaking into a headlong run and the dangling shoe swinging behind her red back.

She was probably running down the road Pastukhov had missed.

"What the hell! Do I look like a paratrooper or something?" he said, even casting a sidelong glance at his steel-blue coat which swung from his shoulders like a cloak.

He took the direction indicated by the girl. Since his childhood he had known that "straight on" in peasant parlance did not necessarily mean in a straight line; you simply had to rely on the road which would take you to the place you wanted. But when, after finding himself on the road almost at once, he noticed that it verged more and more to one side, neatly skirting the clearing he had just left, doubt assailed him—was he going in a circle around one and the same place or was he going back?

"Perhaps I fancied that girl as well?" he thought, and that moment the fairy tale about the stranger came to his mind and again he seemed to hear the laughter issuing from the old man's toothless mouth.

Right then he realised with sudden clarity that the old man was none other but the recent grey-bearded habitant of these wise woods, who had been on his mind all the way he had walked down the road.

In his mind's eye he started to look intently at Tolstoy.

...He saw him with a long, wispy beard which the wind had swept aside on one shoulder. One of his blue penetrating eyes, glinting in the sun, scanned the road from beneath a shaggy white brow. The other eye was shaded by the broad soft brim of a hat pressed windward to his forehead. He sat leaning on one side, driving alone in a two-seater trap. His left shoulder was raised. His hands were thrust out far ahead, holding the reins taut. Pastukhov clearly saw those driving reins: braided—up to the horse's crupper, and leather—further on from the lead plate bobbing up and down on the crupper and to the bit of the tightly bridled muzzle. The big black horse was going at a fast, if a bit heavy trot, drawing nearer and nearer to Pastukhov. He heard a clod of dirt thrown by a hoof hit the front of the trap, which reverberated like a drum. Now the muzzle of the horse was quite close. Specks of froth came flying down its hanging black lip and scattered in a lacelike pattern on the road.

Pastukhov jumped aside onto the edge of the road. Tolstoy drew the reins and stopped. He was dressed in a worn canvas dust-coat with a hood usually worn by carters. Pastukhov timidly took off his hat. He saw Tolstoy's face right up close to his. Presently Tolstoy's eyes swiftly scanned him from head to toe, lingering on his coat of the rarest of colours. Pastukhov could not comprehend why he should be seized by such shame and horror. Now Tolstoy took the reins into one hand and chewed his lips discontentedly. The shaggy growth of his mustache splayed outwards, as it went up to the broad nostrils and down a number of times.

"Good morning," Pastukhov brought out with difficulty.

"Yes, it's a fine day. Good day," Tolstoy said in an unexpectedly high voice. "You want to see me?"

"Yes, I do, Lev Nikolayevich," Pastukhov replied with such finality it seemed that he had decided to throw all caution to the wind.

"I'm off to Kozlova Zaseka to get the mail," Tolstoy said merrily, looking down on him from the carriage with a somewhat provocative air, and it seemed that any minute he would start laughing silently to himself. But the grey bush of his mustache again bristled up as it twitched around his mouth, and he said:

"All right, wait for me at Yasnaya."

Again he distributed the reins in two hands, clicked his tongue in a strangely boisterous and somewhat boyish manner, and the horse leaned into the collar and went off. Dust enveloped Pastukhov, and in its golden swirl he discerned the retreating back of the rider with the tilted shoulder, and Tolstoy disappeared. The dull clatter of hoofs on the dirt road receded in the distance....

With hat in one hand, Pastukhov rubbed his face downward with the other: the vision had passed by, although, truth to tell, it was all too vivid to his mind and it was difficult for him to come to at once.

"Oh dear!" he sighed with pain. "If only he were alive! If he were alive now, but not when I was so young!"

But despite the stab of pain Pastukhov felt relieved. Not a trace remained of those childish fears about losing his bearings. He went on, confident in the road which certainly

led "straight on", as the girl had said, although it veered and meandered along a cantankerous sounding stream. His mind was again occupied not with fancies, but with involuntarily picked up observations in this primeval and vital land overgrown with wooded ridges. He noticed that the forest had changed, it seemed drier, and he was walking through groves which at times were mottled with white dappled birch trees or looked gloomy and a bit mysterious in the dense shade of oak trees. He came upon a footpath, which was then crossed by another one. In the distance he could see a neat lane like in a park, then an apple orchard, and through the tree trunks he glimpsed part of a vegetable garden, a fence and a building.

Then Pastukhov espied a lane of lime trees sloping into the distance. He turned his head slightly. A park clearing with an awkward tilted elm tree in the middle opened to his view, and further on, behind the elm, stood the white house for which he had been making.

He recognised at once the elm and the house with a protruding annexe in the middle, a porch on one side and the back entrance on the other, medium-sized windows on the upper story, a glazed vine-covered terrace on the right: how often in his life had he seen this picture in books—and now it was right there in front of him in reality.

He walked slowly to the house, but on the way he saw a bench encircling the elm in a hoop and, taking a step towards it, he sat down under the tree. His face froze in a respectful and what looked like an embarrassed smile.

"Here I will wait for you, Lev Nikolayevich," he whispered to himself with a tinge of melancholy.

2

He sat there for a long time.

The absence of people did not surprise him—it was still early in the day.

One of the windows above on the right was wide open, within the house somebody went past it, there was a hum of men's voices and then silence descended. On the ground floor, behind the slightly open front door, a noise was heard as if people were moving furniture and carrying something heavy.

Then the door was flung open and four officers, all of them young and with greatcoats in the crook of their arms, came out of the house in a file. After a few strides they stopped near the verandah and started putting on their coats without taking note of Pastukhov. Judging from their boots and greatcoats the officers were not of the urban upstart type but had probably spent many a night sleeping under bushes, in forest gullies, trenches, huts and all sorts of places. One of them threw over his head the belt of a map-case that had lost its leathery glitter, took out a pack of cigarettes, shot its contents out into his palm, and unfurled the cigarettes fanlike between his fingers, distributing them among his comrades. The four of them started to look for matches in their pockets and on failing to find any began to laugh. One of them, a short man with his cap set at a rakish angle, looked round and on seeing Pastukhov went in his direction and before reaching him, asked loudly:

“Got any matches on you, citizen?”

As soon as they had appeared Pastukhov stopped looking at the house and kept his eye on the officers with quite a new interest, which, however, was imperceptibly linked with the feeling that had been gnawing him the whole morning. He responded readily and even seemed to have anticipated the request of the officer, pulling the match box out of his pocket before the officer had the words out of his mouth.

“Please, help yourself.”

Lighting a match and surveying the officer’s bent-down face with its chestnut bristle of unshaved hair and with shadows of fatigue under his eyes, he asked:

“Back from the front-line, I suppose?”

The officer mumbled something through his nose and continued pulling on the cigarette so intently that his cheeks sunk into his mouth and his chin lengthened—in all probability the tobacco had become damp. Pastukhov was on the point of throwing away the match which had burned down to his fingers, when the officer at last got the cigarette going, drew himself up and raised his hand as if he wanted to salute, but, inhaling deeply and blowing a formidable streamer of smoke out of his nose, he quickly looked Pastukhov over from head to toe and just set his cap straight according to regulations.

“Thanks,” he said, swung round on his heels and returned to his comrades.

One by one they lit their cigarettes from his, and he seemed to have told them something, because the moment each of them lit up he slowly turned back to look at Pastukhov. This scrutiny, to which they tried to lend a seemingly innocent air, amused Pastukhov momentarily. "Interested!" he thought gaily.

But that same moment he turned serious: there was something odd about the screwed-up eyes of the officer with the map-case—a kind of arrested gaze, different from the mistrustful curiosity of his comrades.

Then everything happened in quick succession. They turned away from Pastukhov and went to the right along the lane. Without halting, the officer with the map-case peered round again, lagged behind his friends a bit, and then, striding broadly and slightly hopping on one leg, caught up with them.

At that moment some unknown force made Pastukhov jump up from the bench and follow the young men.

The officer with the map-case was the first to hear his footsteps in the lane, he turned round again and stopped. His companions also stopped.

Pastukhov by turns blinked wildly and opened wide his little green-streaked eyes which began to water unexpectedly as he drew nearer, staring straight at the lean pale face with a cigarette sticking out from under its mustache. When he was no more than an arm's length away, he pronounced, breathing heavily and in a voice that was still surprised but nonetheless quite positive:

"Alyosha."

His voice was suppressed, he coughed and smiled awkwardly as if to say—well now, I'm not sure whether you'll like it or not, but I've caught up with you.

Alexei snatched the cigarette out of his mouth and threw it far away. Colour quickly flooded his cheeks and eyes gleamed.

"I thought ... I was mistaken," he said very quietly.

"Something jolted me. It's your gait, it hasn't changed," said Pastukhov without concealing his joy.

He embraced Alexei and kissed him just under his eye so hard it made him squeeze his eyes shut and in response he gave the air a smacking kiss; freeing himself from his father's arms, he looked embarrassedly at his friends, pulled up his sleeve and looked at his watch.

"I'll join you in a minute.... Well, ten minutes to be exact! Go on slowly, I'll catch up. All right?"

The short officer nodded with understanding.

"Carry on, we'll wait."

Pastukhov bowed to him politely, although a bit perfunctorily, and the officer, shifting from foot to foot, seemed to hesitate whether to respond to the courtesy, but in the end decided not to.

At first the three officers watched the scene with a severe look on their faces, but after the kiss they turned away as if with shyness, pretending that all this was, strictly speaking, of little interest to them. But when Alexei started walking back to the bench with Pastukhov, who pressed his son's elbow tightly to his side, the officers followed their retreating figures with the same, slightly thoughtful look on their faces, and the short officer drawled:

"The picture's clear...."

Both Alexander Vladimirovich and his son had many things they were longing to ask each other, but it was equally hard for them to pick out the most essential from this host of questions, and they felt, albeit in different ways, such an intense physical sense of kinship that it contained in itself, for a fleeting moment, all the questions. They remained silent until the father sat down in his former place under the tree and made Alexei sit down at his side.

"Where are you from?" he asked at length.

"We've got here ... well, a little replacement coming up. For the time being I'm staying in Tula. We were given two hours' leave to have a look at the museum. The car's waiting."

Alexei spoke evasively in accordance with his military duty—don't talk about things military to outsiders—and on instinct he again touched the sleeve to have a look at his watch, but checked himself. The father remarked with a smile:

"I've got a good sense of time. I won't keep you." (He put his hand on Alexei's knee and squinted at his tabs with their little squares.) "Infantry?"

"Pioneers."

"Since when?"

"Right after I returned from the holidays in the Crimea I was called up," said Alexei, and without pausing he asked, "How come you're here?"

Alexander Vladimirovich shrugged his shoulders.

"Because of the evacuation, I guess!... In addition to my sense of time I'm now training my sense of space."

He switched to his usual, slightly casual tone, and speaking in an intentional clipped manner as if he were reporting, he stated that he was staying at Yulia Pavlovna's aunt, that with the approach of the Germans he had to ... "get moving" east (before "get moving" he made a little pause), he was promised some "transport" (this, too, was said with an air of importance and drawled through the nose), and he would probably settle down on the Volga.

"But never mind all that," he cut himself short. "Better tell me, how is it with you?..."

Excitement again swept up Pastukhov:

"Why don't you say anything, Alyosha? Have you been at the front? Where've you been? What have you been through?"

"We've been retreating from the Desna, from one line to another. From the Oka, from Belev. And now—can't you see for yourself?"

"Have we been defeated?"

"Never!" Alyosha exclaimed with a start.

Blood rushed unevenly to his cheeks, but it was different from a few minutes before when he had also flushed on meeting his father. Now this was a different man. The vivid similarity with his mother still lived in his face, but it lacked the fine femininity that had graced him in his recent boyhood. Now the injury suffered by an insulted, strong man had carved an almost brutal line deep into his young face, and this was a new Alyosha. A new person, unknown to Pastukhov, mature—and, without any doubt, filled with brutal rage—was sitting next to him. He was really a different person, and in his coarse dress, dilapidated boots and with his handsomely angry face he looked as if he had emerged from under the ground ready there and then to pay with his life for his loud passionate denial: "Never!"

A remarkable, incomprehensible respect for this new person penetrated Pastukhov's heart. He started to speak timidly, and his own voice sounded quite weird to him:

"Of course, Alyosha, of course! Never! That's how it must be. That's ... how it should have been.... But still, how do you explain what's happening? Do you realise where we are

sitting? Do you know? Why, this is the heart of Russia! This is the Tree of the Poor. We are sitting under the tree to which the people of Russia thronged to learn how to overcome their troubles, their eternal poverty, to hear a word of remission from the man who lived in that house over there. For it was with good reason, yes, with very good reason and not by some foolish quirk of fate that this man sprang from this land—here he was born and here he worked, like a master and slave of his genius and here he willed to be buried, and somewhere next to us lie his remains in his, no—in our land. With good reason, Alyosha. Here is the heart of Russia. And tomorrow, the day after tomorrow we may let it ... it may be torn out of us! Our flesh, our spirit. Just think of it, Alyosha, how come and why, are you retreating—well, all right, not you, not you!—all of us are retreating from the Desna, from the Oka.... Where, where to? What do we leave behind and surrender? What's left behind us?"

Alexei raised his hand toward his father and for a long time held it up in the air palm outwards trying to stop him, but finally had to interrupt his unending flow of speech:

"Excuse me, just a minute. Could you really believe that I or, as you put it, we, us soldiers, could for a single moment have forgotten where we are? How can we possibly be deaf to the land which you speak of? Isn't it the heart of this land that beats within us? If you were to trudge with us along a single march you'd know better.... No, no! You must multiply your pain by as many times as there are men in our army."

"I understand you, my friend," Pastukhov said in a thoughtful and uncertain way. "I understand ... and yet I cannot understand!... Why did it happen? How could it all have happened? Not in just any odd place the hell knows where, but over a truly legendary expanse, actually from the Varangians to the Greeks. And surely more than just one understrength corps had found itself in a mess. Armies, fronts are retreating!... Running, are they? Running, yes?... Why do you keep silent? They say that on that very same Desna a whole artillery regiment ran like one man at the sight of Guderian's tanks.... All right, Alexei, don't you make a wry face! It didn't run—it was simply blown away by the wind, batteries and all.... I tell you, we're surrendering the roots of our roots and abandoning the grounds sung of in our lays. But what about the people from those parts? Not all of them

managed to run away. They are falling prey—to whom? To whom are they falling prey? And while we're about it multiplying pain, yours and mine, we might as well multiply it not by as many men as there are in our armies, but by as many people as there are in the entire nation. That pain cannot be measured, Alyosha. To tell you the truth, I don't understand why it all has to happen in such an agonising way, why, why?"

Pastukhov squeezed these words out with his very last breath.

"We're in disarray," said Alyosha, obviously trying to restrain himself. "Our troops are in disarray and we must muster them. Muster them under incessant blows. This just isn't the time for recriminations and arguing about how all that happened. We must face up to the situation as it is and as it has come about. We must act. Nothing else. Yet I do believe in the Red Army."

He stood up and straightened his uniform. His father touched his coat lapel with what looked like a reconciliatory gesture.

"How about another two minutes ... all right?"

Alyosha obeyed and sat down, looking at his father with a smile.

"If so, permit me to say a few words about what you said before. We're different from those people who gathered under this tree. We are not poor. And if today we still continue to lose too much, we'll gain it later on. Wealth didn't come all of itself. We only need to use our hands and heads."

"And what if the heads will roll?"

"One will roll, ten will remain."

"Extravagant," said Pastukhov with a bitter smile. "How many will that make out of two hundred million? Seems like you're counting on the place being decimated."

Alyosha seemed not to hear his father's words.

"My friends and I were sitting on this bench half an hour ago."

He raised his head and looked at the black branches of the decrepit but still mighty trunk with patched-up hollows, to which a bell had been attached.

"I guess we were all thinking the same things as you, albeit in our own way different from yours. I told them that if Tolstoy were alive, no wanderer or visitor would be kept

waiting for him, the old man would come running out of the house to sound the alarm himself and rouse the people in defence of the heart, of which you spoke so well. Thank you for that....”

At this Pastukhov raised his head and looked above at the same moment as his son, whose voice faltered and suddenly became thick.

“But the heart, the heart,” Alyosha said with fervour, “no one will tear out our heart. It’s too big for that!”

As he spoke, Pastukhov could not tear his eyes from both the mute dull-green body of the bell, as though expecting it to ring any minute, and from the branches of the elm, which looked like the extended arms of a huge man who had been stretching himself out after a sound sleep and frozen in this posture.

But the moment Alexei finished speaking Pastukhov dropped his head and leaned aside to have a better look at the person who had uttered words so marvelous that perhaps only he, Alexander Pastukhov, could have thought them up. Alexei’s face shone just as it had in his childhood, and his face took on a relaxed, easy expression, as if he were about to fly off somewhere.

The father put his arm around his shoulder and pulled him to his side.

“My dear boy. Proud, too, I see. To think that this was once my little Alyosha, Alyoshka!...”

He playfully pushed him away and, embarrassedly hiding his sudden outburst of affection behind a semi-mumble, he said, scarcely opening his lips:

“You haggard, mustachioed skeleton ... you reek of tobacco through and through.... You never used to smoke, eh?”

“I do now.” Alexei said with an important air.

““I do now.”” the father repeated, laughing. “Why don’t you tell me something about your health? I noticed you were pale when I first saw you. How was it on the marches?... You’re a frail sort, you know!... And besides, you were given to daydreaming, remember?”

“I think I’ll make a soldier yet,” Alexei replied a bit haughtily. “On one of the marches a motorcycle unit caught up with us. Germans. They had submachine guns, we had rifles. No chance to daydream there. The main thing was: they were on a highway, while we were in a depression

scattered behind hummocks.” (A grin flashed across his face.) “In fact it was those hummocks that saved us. Only when the fire ceased and there was a scramble did I realise that I could have been killed after all.”

“Who scrambled?” asked his father sternly.

“What do you mean? The Germans, of course!”

Pastukhov broke into a laugh.

“I’d love to hear that ‘of course’ more often.... But as for the carelessness about your own life,” he said with a frown and, breathing in deeply, sighed unexpectedly: “My dear boy!”

“It’s time,” Alexei said with a start.

They got up.

“But isn’t it amazing the way we met?” Pastukhov said more with sadness than surprise.

“You know,” Alexei replied in the same tone, “what’s amazing is that I came here. The fact that I met you here doesn’t really surprise me now. Really, believe me. I think something must have brought you here. Maybe nowadays you have to assure yourself by making contact with the most precious thing in your life, which—you’re right!—they’re threatening to take away....”

He said this with sympathy, but the father seemed to hear a note of superiority in his voice.

“To assure myself?... Shrewd,” Alexander Vladimirovich said with a condescending smile. “After all, a man, as a famous writer said, has to have at least some place he can go to.... You even flatter me ... or, to be more precise, it’s flattering to know that you think like that about me ... that it is this very spot near this house which holds the most precious thing for me. Does that mean you haven’t given me up for hopeless?”

“I’ll never give you up for hopeless in that sense,” Alexei replied calmly.

“Mirci,” said Pastukhov, mispronouncing the word and making a grimace which he instantly resented, feeling ashamed that his pride had been hit so hard by his son’s candidness.

Alexei jerked his eyebrow and remained silent for a while, but on seeing his father looking disgruntled with his lip drawn in, he rephrased this intangible thought in what seemed to him a calmer, heartfelt way:

“I know, it must be your talent that brought you here! It’s the thing you prize above all else.... I admired it ever since I was a child. This feeling’s remained with me to this day.” (He became silent for a while.) “I was proud of your talent....”

“And what then? Disappointment set in?”

“I was proud of the talent possessed by my father,” Alexei said, laying a slight emphasis on the last word, and turned his eyes away.

“I have never denied you the right to be my son,” Pastukhov said hastily and abruptly.

Alexei extended his hand, but that instant something made them glance back almost of one accord....

1967

Translated by Anatole Bilenko

K. Simonov

(b. 1915, Petrograd—d. 1979,
Moscow)

Konstantin Simonov worked as a turner in a factory until he was twenty. He began publishing poetry at nineteen. Impelled by an urge to write, he managed to qualify for the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute, graduating at the age of twenty-three. Ever since then he was professional writer. He published poems, lyrical verse and plays, stories, novels and publicistic books.

He came into contact with the harsh realities of war earlier than many: in 1939 he went as military correspondent to the zone of frontier fighting near Lake Khasan. All through the Great Patriotic War, Simonov was a correspondent for the army newspaper RED STAR. His poems and plays of that period achieved a nationwide reputation, since they combined personal lyricism with the social feelings that united the Soviet people in the hour of national peril.

Simonov was with the Soviet Army during its tragic withdrawal to the Volga, and not only witnessed, but took an active part in the

fighting on all fronts where the Soviet Union's fate hung in the balance. After personally experiencing everything that the defenders of Stalingrad went through, Konstantin Simonov was with our troops when they fought their way back to the Soviet frontier. He was in Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia (where he fought together with partisans) when those countries were being liberated from fascism, then in Poland and Germany, where he witnessed the last battles for Berlin.

The subject of the Great Patriotic War is central to his work. In 1959, his novel *THE LIVING AND THE DEAD* was published, in which he described the tragic first months of the war. These were the months of retreat when the bowstring of the people's resistance to the invaders, who were stopped just outside Moscow, was stretched to the limit.

Of the many factors that determined the course and the final outcome of the war, the most vital was the unexampled heroism of the Soviet people, their fortitude and mortal hatred for the invaders. Such people were portrayed by Simonov: the artillerymen who towed their anti-tank gun over 400 kilometres from the frontier, the seasoned General Serpilin, or Sintsov, who by a fluke of fate, exchanged his journalist's pen for a soldier's submachine gun; these literary characters are representatives of the people who helped to halt the German hordes and drive them back.

After *THE LIVING AND THE DEAD* came its sequels, *NOT BORN TO BE SOLDIERS* and *THE LAST SUMMER*. The trilogy was awarded the Lenin Prize and is now without question the most important work about the most tragic and heroic period in the history of the Soviet Union.

Simonov had an extraordinary capacity for work. Something new of his came out every year. An active public figure, a striking journalist, a permanent member of the Secretariat of the Soviet Writers' Union, Konstantin Simonov exemplified the writer of the new type who feels personally involved in whatever concerns his country and its literature.

The Living and the Dead

(An excerpt)

The men from this division had been proceeding in small groups of two or three. Half of them were unarmed. After a talk with them, Serpilin formed them up, mixing them with his own men—the unarmed soldiers as they were, saying that they would have to get their own weapons in battle, since he had none to spare.

Serpilin spoke sharply to them, but not rudely. To the senior political instructor, who excused himself on the grounds that although he was unarmed, at least he had kept his full uniform and Party card, Serpilin sourly objected that a Communist at the front should respect his arms as much as his Party card.

“We’re not going to Golgotha, my dear Comrade,” said Serpilin. “We’re in battle. At least it’s in your favour that you have a conscience. You’d rather be stood up against a wall and shot than tear off your commissar’s insignia. But that’s not enough for us. We don’t want to be stood up against a wall: we want to stand the nazis up against one. And you won’t do that without arms. That’s the way it is! Now join the column, and I hope you’ll be the first to get a weapon in the fighting.”

After the embarrassed senior political instructor put several paces between himself and Serpilin, the latter called him back, unclipped one of the two pineapple grenades at his belt, and held it out on the upturned palm of his hand.

“That’s to give you a start!”

Sintsov, who was, in his capacity as adjutant, writing the names, ranks and unit numbers down in a notebook, was inwardly pleased at the inexhaustible reserve of patience and cool-headedness shown by Serpilin in dealing with the men.

It is impossible to read another man’s mind, but more than once during the last few days Sintsov had formed the impression that Serpilin had no fear of death. This may not have been so, but it certainly looked like it.

At the same time, Serpilin didn’t pretend not to understand that men could lose their nerve, run away, go to pieces, and throw down their weapons. On the contrary, he did not hesitate to make it clear that he understood all this, but at the

same time he firmly implanted in their minds the notion that their fear and their recent defeat were already things of the past. What had happened couldn't happen again: they had lost their weapons, but they could acquire new ones. That is probably why the men left Serpilin without feeling crushed, even when he had spoken sharply to them. He quite rightly didn't relieve them of their guilt, but he didn't make them feel totally to blame either. They sensed this and wanted to prove that his faith in them was justified.

Before the evening bivouac, there was another encounter, quite different from all the previous ones. A sergeant and a Red Armyman returned from the flank patrol, which was proceeding through the very densest part of the forest, with two armed men under escort. One was a little private with a worn leather jacket over his tunic and a rifle on his shoulder. The other was a tall, handsome man of about forty, with a big, aquiline nose. The aristocratic grey hair protruding from under his forage cap lent an air of distinction to his youngish, clean, unlined face. He was wearing good-quality riding-breeches and patent leather boots, and slung over his shoulder was a brand-new submachine gun with a circular ammunition drum; but his forage cap was soiled and greasy, and the equally soiled and greasy private's tunic looked awkward on him, didn't fit round the neck, and was too short in the sleeves.

The sergeant came up to Serpilin with these two, glanced at them and, with his rifle at the ready, said: "Permission to report, Comrade Brigade Commander! I've brought two detainees. I arrested them and brought them under escort because they won't give an account of themselves and because of their appearance. They refused to be disarmed, and we didn't want to open fire in the forest unnecessarily."

"Colonel Baranov, Deputy Chief of the Operational Department of Army HQ," rapped the officer with the submachine gun, bringing his hand smartly up to his forage cap and springing to attention in front of Serpilin and Shmakov. He sounded angry and irritated.

"Our apologies," said the sergeant who had brought the detainees, also saluting.

"Why apologise?" demanded Serpilin, turning to him. "You did right to arrest them, and you did right to bring them to me. Continue to act that way in future. You may go! Your

documents please.” And, having dismissed the sergeant, he turned to the colonel without addressing him by rank.

The latter’s face twitched in an embarrassed smile. Sintsov realised that this man evidently knew Serpilin, but had only just recognised him and had been shaken by the encounter.

This, in fact, was so. The man who had called himself Colonel Baranov and who indeed bore this name and rank and held the appointment which he had mentioned, was so far from expecting to find Serpilin in front of him, here, in the forest, in military uniform and surrounded by other officers, that at first he had merely noticed that the tall brigade commander with the German submachine gun slung over his shoulder seemed to remind him of someone.

“Serpilin!” he exclaimed, flinging open his arms—it was hard to say whether in extreme astonishment or because he wanted to embrace Serpilin.

“Yes. I’m Brigade Commander Serpilin,” said the latter in an unexpectedly dry, metallic voice. “I’m the commander of the division entrusted to me; but I can’t tell who you are at the moment. Your documents!”

“Serpilin, I’m Baranov! What’s the matter with you? Have you gone mad?”

“For the last time, please produce your documents,” said Serpilin, still in the same metallic voice.

“I have no documents,” said Baranov after a long pause.

“And how come you have no documents?”

“It just happened that way. I lost them accidentally. I left them in the other tunic when I changed into this soldier’s one...” And Baranov ran his fingers over the greasy tunic that was too tight for him and didn’t fit.

“You left your documents in the other tunic? And are your colonel’s insignia also on the other tunic?”

“Yes,” sighed Baranov.

“Then why should I believe that you are Colonel Baranov, Deputy Chief of the Operational Department of Army HQ?”

“But you know me! We were at the academy together!” muttered Baranov, now very much at a loss.

“We’ll assume that,” said Serpilin, not in the least mollified and still with the same metallic hardness that Sintsov found so unusual. “But if you hadn’t met me, who would be able to confirm your identity, rank and appointment?”

“He would,” said Baranov, pointing to the little Red

Armyman in the leather jacket beside him. "He's my driver."

"Have you your documents with you, Comrade?" said Serpilin, turning to the driver without looking at Baranov.

"Yes..." stammered the soldier, at first not quite sure how to address Serpilin. "Yes, Comrade General!" He opened his leather jacket, took out of his tunic pocket a Red Armyman's book wrapped up in a piece of cloth, and offered it to Serpilin.

"Ah," said Serpilin, and he read aloud: "'Red Armyman Zolotarev, Pyotr Ilyich, military unit 22/14.' That's all right." And he gave the soldier back his book. "Tell me, Comrade Zolotarev, can you confirm the identity, rank and appointment of this man with whom you have been detained?" And, still not turning to Baranov, he jerked his thumb at the colonel.

"Yes, Comrade General, that really is Colonel Baranov. I'm his driver."

"So you confirm that this is your commander?"

"Yes, Comrade General."

"Stop playing games, Serpilin!" shouted Baranov in exasperation.

But Serpilin never even glanced at him.

"It's just as well that at least you were able to identify your commander, otherwise, in different circumstances, he might have been shot. No documents, no badges of rank, someone else's tunic, and an officer's breeches and boots..."

Serpilin's voice grew grimmer and grimmer at each word. "Under what circumstances did you get here?" he asked after a pause.

"I can explain everything..." began Baranov, but Serpilin, turning to him at last, cut him off short.

"I'm not asking you at the moment." He turned back to the Red Armyman. "Report..."

Hesitantly at first, then gaining confidence and trying not to forget anything, the Red Armyman told how they had arrived from the Army three days back and had spent the night in Divisional HQ. In the morning, the colonel had gone to HQ, but the Germans began bombing the whole area. Shortly afterwards, a driver arrived from the rear with the news that the Germans had made an airborne landing with tanks back there. Hearing this, the driver had started up his engine in case of emergency. An hour later, the colonel had hurried

back, praised him on having his engine running, jumped in, and ordered him to head back to Chaussy as quickly as possible. When they had driven out on to the highway, there had been heavy firing and smoke in front of them, so they had turned off on to a side-road and proceeded along it; but they had heard firing again and had seen German tanks at the cross-roads. They had then turned off down a side-track leading into the forest, had swung off the road under the trees, and the colonel had then ordered him to stop the car.

As he was recounting all this, the driver glanced at his colonel from time to time as if seeing confirmation from him; but the latter stood in silence with his head bowed. The most painful part of the story for him was about to begin, and he knew it.

"He ordered you to stop the car," Serpilin repeated the man's last words. "And what happened then?"

"Then the comrade colonel ordered me to take out my old tunic and forage cap from under the seat—I'd lately been issued with a new uniform, and I'd kept the old tunic and cap, just in case, say, I had to crawl under the car. The comrade colonel took off his tunic and forage-cap and put my things on instead, and then he said that we'd have to get out of encirclement on foot now, and he ordered me to throw petrol over the car and set it on fire. Except that I..." the driver hesitated, "except that I didn't know, Comrade General, that the comrade colonel had left his documents in his own tunic, otherwise I'd have reminded him, if I'd known; but as it was I set them on fire with the car."

He felt himself to blame.

Serpilin was visibly shocked.

"You hear that, Baranov?" he said, turning to the latter. "Your driver regrets not reminding you about your documents." There was a marked sneer in his voice. "It would be interesting to know what would have happened if he had reminded you about them, wouldn't it?" He turned back to the driver. "And what happened next?"

"We carried on for two days, keeping under cover. Until we met you..."

"Thank you, Comrade Zolotarev," said Serpilin. "Enter his name in your lists, Sintsov. Catch up with the column and take your place in the line. You'll get your food rations on bivouac."

The driver was about to go, then stopped short and looked inquiringly at his colonel. But the latter was still standing with his eyes on the ground.

"Go!" said Serpilin authoritatively. "You're free."

The driver went away. There was an uncomfortable silence.

"Why did you have to question him in my presence? You could have asked me without compromising me in front of a private."

"I asked him, because I trust the version of a soldier who has kept his documents more than I trust that of a colonel who has changed his clothes and has no insignia of rank or documents," said Serpilin. "At least I've got the whole picture now. You arrived at the division with orders to check that the Army commander's orders were being carried out. Yes or no?"

"Yes," said Baranov, still staring stubbornly at the ground.

"And instead of doing so, you cleared off at the first sign of danger! You dropped everything and you cleared off. Yes or no?"

"Not quite," said Baranov.

"How d'you mean, 'not quite'?"

But Baranov stayed silent. However insulted he may have felt, there was nothing he could say.

"I compromised him before a private! You hear that, Shmakov?" said Serpilin, turning to him. "What a laugh! He got the wind up, took off his officer's tunic in front of a private, threw away his documents, and now it turns out that I've compromised him. I didn't compromise you in front of a private. Thanks to your disgraceful conduct, you compromised the headquarters staff of the Army in front of a private. If my memory doesn't play me false, you were a Party member. Did you burn your Party card as well?"

"It was all burnt." And Baranov shrugged his shoulders.

"You say that you accidentally left your documents in your tunic?" It was Shmakov, white with anger, intervening in the conversation for the first time.

"Accidentally," said Baranov.

"In my opinion, you're lying. In my opinion, if your driver had reminded you, you'd have got rid of them just the same at the first suitable opportunity."

"What for?" asked Baranov.

"You know better than I do."

"But I was still armed," said Baranov.

"If you burnt your Party card before there was any real danger, then you'd have thrown down your gun at the sight of your first German."

"He hung on to his gun because he was scared of the wolves in the forest," said Serpilin.

"I kept it in case of Germans!" shouted Baranov shrilly. "In case of Germans!"

"I don't believe you," said Serpilin. "You, a staff commander, had a whole division under you, and yet you left it in the lurch! How were you going to fight the Germans single-handed?"

"Fyodor Fyodorovich, what's the point of going on like this? I'm not a schoolboy. I understand everything," said Baranov, suddenly quiet.

But Serpilin only reacted with distrust to this unexpected humility on Baranov's part. It was as if the colonel, who had hitherto been frantically trying to justify himself, had suddenly decided it might pay him to change his tune.

"What do you understand?" he asked.

"My guilt. I'll wipe it out with blood. Give me a company, or even a platoon. After all, I was heading for my own people, not the Germans. Can you believe that?"

"I don't know," said Serpilin. "In my opinion, you weren't proceeding anywhere in particular. You were just proceeding according to the circumstances and letting things take their own course..."

"I curse the moment when I burnt my documents and I'm sorry..." began Baranov. But Serpilin cut him short:

"I believe you're sorry now. You're sorry now that you were in such a hurry, because you ended up with your own people. But if things had turned out otherwise—well, I don't know whether you'd have been so sorry. What do you think, Commissar?" He turned to Shmakov. "Shall we give this ex-colonel a company?"

"No," said Shmakov.

"A platoon?"

"No," said Shmakov.

"I'd say the same. After the way you acquitted yourself, I'd sooner trust your driver to command you, than you to command him!" said Serpilin, and for the first time he spoke to Baranov a shade more gently than before. "Go and get in

line with that fancy little submachine gun of yours and see if you can, as you say, wipe out your guilt with blood. German blood," he added, after a pause. "And with your own too, if need be. By virtue of the authority invested in myself and the commissar, you are hereby reduced to the ranks until we join up with our own forces. You will then account for your own behaviour, and we for taking the law into our own hands."

"Is that all? Have you nothing more to say?" asked Baranov, raising his head and looking resentfully at Serpilin.

Serpilin winced at this, and he even shut his eyes for a second to hide his feelings.

"You can thank us for not having you shot for cowardice," put in Shmakov instead of Serpilin.

"Sintsov," said Serpilin, opening his eyes, "enter Private Baranov on the unit rolls. Go with him," he nodded towards Baranov, "to Lieutenant Khoryshev and tell him that Private Baranov is now under his command."

"You're in command here, Fyodor Fyodorovich, and I shall obey your orders. But don't expect me to forget this."

Serpilin clasped his hands behind his back and cracked his fingers, but said nothing.

"Let's go," said Sintsov to Baranov, and they began to catch up with the column, which was now ahead of them.

Shmakov looked intently at Serpilin. Himself upset by what had just happened, he sensed that Serpilin was feeling even more badly shaken. The brigade commander was apparently deeply pained by this disgraceful conduct on the part of someone he had once respected.

"Fyodor Fyodorovich!"

"What?" replied Serpilin, as if waking up out of dream, and even starting slightly. He had become lost in his thoughts and had forgotten that Shmakov was beside him.

"Why are you so upset? Were you in the service together a long time? Did you know him well?"

Serpilin looked at him vaguely and surprised the commissar by answering with uncharacteristic evasiveness:

"Does anybody ever know anybody really well? Let's get a move on until it's time for a halt!"

Shmakov didn't like to force confidences out of people, so he fell silent. Both men quickened their pace and walked side by side until it was time for a halt, neither of them saying anything and each wrapped in his own thoughts.

Shmakov had got it wrong. Although Baranov had indeed been with Serpilin at the Academy, Serpilin, so far from having a high opinion of him, had actually despised him. He had regarded Baranov as an out-and-out careerist, interested purely in his own self-advancement and not in the good of the service. While he taught at the Academy Baranov was ready to support one doctrine today and another tomorrow—to say that white was black and black was white. Skilfully adapting himself to what he thought might please his superiors, he was not above supporting blatant errors of judgement based on ignorance of facts of which he was perfectly well aware.

His hobby-horse was reports and information about the armies of hypothetical enemies. While emphasising the real and imaginary weaknesses, he obligingly kept quiet about all the strong and dangerous sides of the future enemy. Although well aware that he was treading on very thin ice where such matters were concerned, Serpilin condemned Baranov for this on three occasions—twice to his face in private, and the third time in public.

He had later been reminded of all this in quite unexpected circumstances, and goodness only knows what it had cost him, during the conversation with Baranov, not to come out with everything that had suddenly been stirred up in his heart.

He didn't know whether he was right or wrong to think as he did of Baranov, but he knew well that this was not the time or the place for remembering old grudges. They just didn't matter!

The most difficult moment in their conversation had been when Baranov had suddenly looked Serpilin inquiringly straight in the face. But he had withstood even that look, and Baranov had gone away reassured—at least if that parting shot of his was anything to go by.

Well, so be it. He, Serpilin, had neither the inclination nor the right to become personally involved with his subordinate, Private Baranov. If the latter fought bravely, Serpilin would thank him in front of the unit. If he died an honourable death, Serpilin would send in a report. If he turned yellow and ran for it, Serpilin would have him shot, just as he would have anyone else shot in the circumstances. He would be completely fair. But what a painful business nevertheless.

They bivouacked near a human habitation—the first they had seen in the forest. There was an old woodman's cabin on

the edge of a clearing that had been ploughed up to serve as a kitchen garden. There was a well close by—a joy to the men, who were enervated by the intense heat.

As Sintsov stepped down from the porch, he saw Serpilin approaching the cabin.

“Comrade Brigade Commander...” he began. But the little doctor ran up to Serpilin ahead of him and, deeply agitated, said that Colonel Zaichikov wanted him urgently.

“I’ll come later if I have time,” said Serpilin with a wave of the hand to Sintsov in reply to his invitation to go inside the cabin for a rest, and he went off after the doctor.

Zaichikov was lying on the stretcher in the shade under a dense clump of hazel bushes. He had just been given a drink of water and had clearly had some difficulty in getting it down. His tunic collar and his shoulders were wet.

“I’m here, Nikolai Petrovich,” said Serpilin, sitting down on the ground beside Zaichikov.

Zaichikov opened his eyes so slowly that it was as if even this movement cost him more strength than he could summon.

“Listen, Fedya,” he whispered, addressing Serpilin in this way for the first time. “Why not shoot me, eh? I haven’t the strength to suffer like this. Do me a favour.”

“I can’t,” said Serpilin, and his voice shook.

“It’s not just that I’m suffering—I’m a burden to you all,” said Zaichikov, enunciating each word with an effort.

“I can’t,” repeated Serpilin.

“Give me a pistol, then, and I’ll shoot myself.”

Serpilin said nothing.

“Scared of the responsibility?”

“You mustn’t shoot yourself,” said Serpilin, pulling himself together. “You haven’t the right. It’ll have a bad effect on the men. If it was just the two of us...”

He didn’t finish; but the dying Zaichikov believed, that were they alone together, Serpilin would not refuse him the right to shoot himself.

“I’m in such pain,” he said, closing his eyes, “in such pain. Serpilin, if only you knew—I can’t bear it any longer. Put me to sleep. Order the doctor to put me to sleep. I keep asking her, but she won’t give me the stuff. She says she hasn’t got any. Couldn’t you check and see if she’s telling the truth?”

He was lying motionless again, his eyes closed and his lips shut tight. Serpilin stood up and, stepping aside, called the doctor over.

"Is it hopeless?" he asked quietly.

She merely shrugged.

"What's the use of asking? Three times I've thought he was going. He is a few hours left at the most."

"Have you something to put him to sleep with?" asked Serpilin quietly but firmly.

The doctor looked at him in fright with her big, child-like eyes.

"It's not allowed!" she said.

"I know what's not allowed. It's my responsibility," said Serpilin. "Have you got anything or haven't you?"

"No," said the doctor; and he felt that she was telling the truth.

"I can't bear to see him suffer like that," he said.

"D'you think I can bear it, then?" she replied and, to Serpilin's surprise, she began to cry, rubbing the tears all over her cheeks with her fists.

Serpilin turned away.

He went back to Zaichikov, sat down beside him, and studied his face intently.

With the approach of death, his cheeks had sunk in and emaciation made him look younger. Serpilin suddenly remembered that Zaichikov was all of six years younger than himself and had still been a young platoon commander towards the end of the Civil War when he, Serpilin, was already in command of a regiment. And at this recollection of the distant past, Serpilin was overwhelmed with bitterness that he, no longer a young man, should be watching over the death-bed of a man so much his junior. "Oh, Zaichikov, Zaichikov," thought Serpilin, "you didn't exactly set the world on fire when you were under my command; you served better than some and worse than others; then you fought in the Finnish campaign, and bravely too, I'm sure; they don't give two Orders for nothing; and you didn't funk it near Mogilev either, you kept your head, you stayed in command as long as you could stand on your own two feet, and now you're dying here in this forest, and you don't know, and you never will, when this war's going to be over that's cost you so much grief from the day it started..."

Zaichikov, suddenly opening his eyes and seeing Serpilin seated beside him.

No, he wasn't unconscious. He was lying and thinking about the same things, or almost the same things, as Serpilin.

"Why shouldn't we keep it?" said Serpilin confidently. "We'll get out with the colours, we'll get out with our weapons, and we'll report what sort of a fight we put up. Why shouldn't we keep it? We haven't dishonoured it, and we're not going to dishonour it either. I give you my word as a Communist..."

"Good..." said Zaichikov, closing his eyes. "But I'm in great pain. Go away, you've got things to do!" he said very quietly but with great effort, and once more he bit his lip in pain.

At eight o'clock in the evening, Serpilin's detachment reached the south-eastern fringe of the forest. Ahead of them, according to the map, lay another two kilometres of sparse woodland, and beyond that the highway, which they had no means of avoiding. On the other side of the road lay a village, a strip of ploughed land, and only then did the forest begin again. Halting short of the woodland, Serpilin ordered his troops to fall out for a rest, anticipating a battle and then a night crossing to follow. The men needed the chance to regain their strength and get some sleep. Many had been at their last gasp for some time, but had kept going, aware that if they didn't come out onto the highway and cross it during the night, then all their efforts hitherto would have been pointless: they would have to wait until the following night...

Serpilin gave orders that he was to be woken as soon as the reconnaissance patrol returned and then blissfully stretched himself out on the grass. After tossing from side to side for a while, Shmakov also dozed off. Sintsov, who had received no instructions from Serpilin, with difficulty resisted the temptation to lie down and go to sleep too. If Serpilin had told him that he could go to sleep, he wouldn't have been able to resist and would have lain down. But Serpilin hadn't said anything, and so Sintsov, struggling to keep awake, began to pace to and fro across the little glade in which the brigade commander and the commissar had gone to sleep. Previously, he had only

heard stories of people dozing off on their feet; but now he experienced it himself, suddenly stopping from time to time and losing his balance.

“Comrade Political Instructor,” said a quiet and familiar voice at one such moment.

Khoryshev was standing in front of him.

“What’s happened?” asked Sintsov, noticing with alarm the signs of great agitation on the lieutenant’s boyish face, usually so calm and cheerful.

“It’s alright. They’ve found a gun in the forest. I want to report to the brigade commander.”

Khoryshev was still keeping his voice down, but Serpilin must have been woken by the word “gun”. He propped himself up on his hands, looked at the sleeping Shmakov, and quietly and quickly got to his feet, indicating with a gesture that Khoryshev should not report at full voice, otherwise they might wake the commissar.

Straightening his tunic and signalling Sintsov to follow him, he walked several paces into the forest interior. Only then did he allow Khoryshev to make his report.

“Well, what kind of gun have they found there? German?”

“Ours. And five men with it.”

“What about ammunition?”

“One round left.”

“Not a lot. Is it far from here?”

“About five hundred paces.”

Serpilin shrugged off the last traces of sleep and told Khoryshev to take him to the gun.

On the way, Sintsov felt like asking why the usually calm lieutenant was looking so agitated; but Serpilin covered the whole distance in silence and Sintsov couldn’t bring himself to disturb him.

After about five hundred paces, they saw a 45-mm anti-tank gun standing in the middle of a copse of young fir-trees. Near the gun, on a thick carpet of old, russet fir needles, the five artillerymen already mentioned by Khoryshev were sitting with Khoryshev’s own platoon.

As soon as the brigade commander appeared, all jumped to their feet—the artillerymen somewhat later than the rest, but nevertheless before Khoryshev had given the command.

“Good evening, Comrades!” said Serpilin. “Which of you is acting as senior?”

A sergeant-major stepped forward. The peak of his cap, with its black artillery band, was split in two. One eye was nothing but a swollen wound; the upper lid of the other was twitching nervously. But he stood firm and steady, as if his feet in the tattered boots were nailed to the ground, and his hand snapped to the split peak of his cap as if the arm in the ragged, scorched sleeve was worked by a spring. His voice deep and strong, but quivering slightly with excitement, he reported that he, Sergeant-Major Shestakov of the Ninth Independent Anti-tank Battalion, was at present the senior in command. He had fought his way out from near Brest, bringing with him what was left of the equipment.

"From where did you say?" asked Serpilin, wondering if he had heard right.

"From near Brest, where the full battalion was engaged in its first battle with the nazis," replied the sergeant-major, rapping the words out rather than just saying them.

There was a silence.

Serpilin stared at the artillerymen, wondering if what he had heard could be true. And the longer he looked at them, the clearer it became that this incredible story was the real truth, while what the Germans were writing in their leaflets about their victory was nothing but a plausible lie.

Five blackened and starved faces, five pairs of tired, overworked hands, five soaked and dirty tunics, torn by tree branches, five German submachine guns captured, and a gun, the battalion's last gun, dragged by these soldiers all the way from the frontier, a distance of over four hundred kilometres. No, Messrs Germans, you're not going to have it all your own way!

"With your bare hands?" asked Serpilin, swallowing a lump in his throat and nodding at the gun.

The sergeant-major replied, and the others, unable to restrain themselves, chorused their support, to the effect that they'd towed it in various ways: by horse, then by hand, then they'd come by some horses again, and then they'd had to tow it along by hand once more...

"What about the rivers—how did you get it across the Dnieper?" asked Serpilin.

"On a raft, the night before last..."

"And we never managed to bring over a single one," said Serpilin suddenly. But although he ran his eyes over all his

own men as he spoke, they felt that he was only reproaching one person—himself.

Then he looked at the artillerymen again.

"Is it true that you have shells with you?"

"One round ... the last," said the sergeant-major apologetically, as if guilty of negligence in failing to replenish the ammunition supplies in time.

"Where did you expend the round before the last?"

"Here, ten kilometres away." The sergeant-major jerked his thumb to the rear, where the highway ran behind the forest. "We rolled the gun last night up to the road, into the bushes, at point-blank range. We hit the leading lorry in a convoy smack in the headlights!"

"Weren't you scared of them combing the forest?"

"We're sick of being scared, Comrade Brigade Commander. Let them be scared of us for a change!"

"So they didn't comb the forest after all?"

"No. They just lobbed some mortar bombs round us. The battalion commander was fatally wounded."

"Where is he?" demanded Serpilin quickly; but he already knew where before he had finished speaking.

He had followed the sergeant-major's eyes to a spot nearby where the yellow mound of a freshly-dug grave stood under an enormous pine-tree, bare to the very summit. The broad German sword with which they had cut the turf to lay round the grave had not yet been removed and was sticking up out of the ground like an unwanted cross.

A rough criss-cross, still oozing resin, had been slashed into the bark of the pine-tree over the grave. To the left and right of it were two more gashes, just as evil-looking, like a challenge to fate or a silent promise to return.

Serpilin went up to the grave and, removing his cap, looked long and silently at the ground, as if trying to stare through it at something no one would ever see again—the face of the man who had fought his way from Brest, bringing to this forest by the Dnieper all that was left of his battalion: five men, a gun, and one last round of ammunition.

Serpilin had never seen him, but he felt that he knew just what sort of person he had been: the kind of man for whom soldiers will go through fire and water; the kind of man whose dead body is carried away from the battle by soldiers at the

risk of their own lives; the kind of man whose orders are obeyed even after his death; the kind of man it took to rescue this gun and these soldiers.

But these men, whom he had brought out, were worthy of their commander. He had been what he had been because he had marched with them....

Serpilin replaced his cap and silently shook hands with each artilleryman in turn. Then he pointed to the grave and asked abruptly:

"Name?"

"Captain Gusev."

"Don't write it down; I'll remember it till my dying day," said Serpilin, noticing that Sintsov had reached for his map-case. "No—write it down. We're all mortal! And enter the artillerymen on the unit rolls. Thanks for everything you've done, Comrades! As for your last round—I think we'll be firing that off in action tonight."

Serpilin had already noticed Baranov's grey head among Khoryshev's soldiers and the artillerymen; but it was only now that their eyes met and Serpilin read terror in the other man's eyes at the thought of the impending battle.

"Comrade Brigade Commander!" said the little doctor, coming up from behind the soldiers. "The colonel wants you!"

"The colonel?" asked Serpilin. His mind was on Baranov, and it took him a moment to grasp which colonel was sending for him. "Of course, let's go, let's go," he said, realising that the doctor meant Zaichikov.

"What's happened? Why wasn't I sent for?" exclaimed the doctor when she saw the soldiers gathered round the new grave.

"It's alright. Let's go. It was too late to send for you!" said Serpilin, and with rough gentleness he put his big hand on her shoulder, almost forcibly turned her round and, his hand still resting on her shoulder, went away with her.

"No faith, no honour, no conscience." He was still thinking of Baranov as he walked beside the doctor. "As long as war seemed a long way off, he used to shout that it would be a walk-over when the time came. But now it's arrived, and he's been the first to run for it. If *he's* scared, if *he's* terrified, then he thinks it's all up with us and we can't win! The hell it does! Apart from yourself, there's Captain Gusev, and his artillerymen, and us sinners, the living and the dead, and this

little doctor here, who has to hold a revolver with both hands..."

Serpilin suddenly realised that his heavy hand was still resting on the doctor's thin shoulder—was not just resting on it, but even using it for support. She carried on as if unaware, however, and was even deliberately giving him that support. She probably never even suspected that there were people like Baranov in this world.

"Sorry, I forgot my hand was on your shoulder," he said to the doctor gently. And he removed it.

"I don't mind. Lean on me if you're tired," she said. "I'm pretty strong, you know."

"Yes, you're strong," thought Serpilin. "We can't lose with people like you, and that's a fact." He wanted to say something affectionate and confident to this little woman as an answer to his private thoughts about Baranov; but he couldn't find the words, and so they continued in silence to where Zaichikov was lying.

"Comrade Colonel, I've brought him," she said softly, going down on her knees and bending right down to Zaichikov's face.

Serpilin kneeled beside her and she moved aside so as not to prevent him also bending closer.

"Is that you, Serpilin?" asked Zaichikov in a scarcely audible whisper.

"Yes."

"Listen to what I'm going to tell you," said Zaichikov even more quietly, and he fell silent.

Serpilin waited a minute, then two, then three; but he was not destined to know what the former commander had wanted to say in the last moment of his life to the new divisional CO.

"He's gone," said the doctor almost inaudibly.

Serpilin slowly removed his cap, remained bareheaded for a few moments on his knees, straightened them with an effort, stood up and, without saying a word, went back.

The scouts returned with the information that there were German patrols on the highway and that there was traffic heading towards Chaussy.

"So we're going to have to fight our way through," said Serpilin. "Rouse the men and form them up!"

Now that he knew that his suppositions had been confirmed and that they were unlikely to get across the road without a

fight, he finally shook off the feeling of physical weariness that had dogged him since morning. He was full of determination to take these men, now getting up from their sleep with their rifles in their hands, where he was supposed to take them—to join up with the main Soviet forces! He was not even prepared to consider an alternative.

That night he did not, and could not, know the full value of what had already been achieved by the men of his regiment. And, like him and those under his command, the full value of what they had done and were doing was not yet known in thousands of other places to thousands of other men who were fighting to the death with a stubbornness never anticipated or envisaged by the Germans.

They did not, and could not, know that the generals at the head of German army that was still advancing in triumph on Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, would, in twenty years' time, call that July of Forty-One the month of deceived hopes, of successes that did not culminate in victory.

They themselves could not have foreseen the enemy's future bitter admissions; but almost each and every man at that time, in July, did everything humanly possible to ensure that things should happen exactly as they did.

Serpilin stood and listened to the subdued commands. The column was stirring raggedly in the darkness that had descended on the forest. A flat, ruddy moon was rising over the jagged tree-tops. The first day of encirclement was nearly at an end...

1959

Translated by Alex Miller

G. Baklanov

(b. 1923, Voronezh)

Grigory Baklanov was slightly over eighteen when the Great Patriotic War broke out. He served all through the war and saw the end of it in defeated nazi Germany. An irresistible urge to write brought him into literature. His work, naturally enough, was based on the harsh realities of the recent war. He became widely known through his novels, *AN INCH OF EARTH* (1959) and *THE DEAD ARE NOT SHAMED* (1961). Baklanov was reproached by the critics for a certain isolatedness of action until the publication of "The Cost of War" (1962), a story that truly touches the heart.

It provides but one detail to the huge overall canvas of the conclusion of the world-wide struggle with fascism; but how much this detail reveals! Having defeated the nazi invaders and driven them from our country, the Soviet Army brought peace and freedom from fascism to the countries of Europe, including Germany itself. Then it was that Soviet soldiers who had

experienced all the pain and all the horror of human losses that can fall to the lot of an individual, discovered that no less appalling sufferings had been endured by the prisoners of the nazi Reich. They also understood why the German lordlings supported Hitler's inhuman regime: they stood to profit by it! What did they care for the sufferings and torments of their slaves if, by the labours of these unfortunate creatures, their own wealth was being increased!...

Grigory Baklanov's "The Cost of War" is a vivid artistic document and a major social generalisation which applies, unfortunately, not only to the past...

Subsequently, Baklanov has published two more novels—JULY, FORTY-ONE (1965), THE FRIENDS (1976)—and CANADA (1976), a book of travel notes.

The Cost of War

It was the month of May, six days after the end of hostilities, and we were stationed in a German village. There were five of us, four reconnaissance scouts and myself, the officer in charge. The village did not resemble our villages in the least: it consisted of twelve sturdy houses, under every house was a well-swept sand-strewn cellar lined with barrels of cold cider, in every yard were hens and pink pigs, in every barn were Dutch cows that kept sighing deeply, and behind every house were carefully cultivated fields of corn. The peaceful sun of spring shone down upon all of this—the little fields, the red tiled roofs, the pink pigs, and the farmers who bowed to us good-naturedly every morning. They instantly accepted a state of peace, without any mental perturbation, as if the only thing required for this was to take off their boots and put on the felt slippers they had exchanged for boots six years before. They avoided discussing the war, limiting their comments to a sad shake of the head and the murmuring of Hitler's name, as much as to say: he's the guilty one, let him answer for it; as for them, they had exchanged their boots for felt slippers.

On the second day of peace we found a German corporal hiding in the fields beyond the village. He was a tall man in a shiny black macintosh with a velvet collar such as German officers wore, and at first we were at a loss what to do with him. As I looked at his sharp shoulders hunched beneath the shiny macintosh, I was keenly conscious of how relative all human values are. Two days ago he would have been our enemy; now he was neither enemy nor prisoner of war; and yet it was hard for us to let him go.

One day back in July 1941, when we were retreating and had already suffered many losses, we took a German prisoner. As soon as we saw his big calloused hands, the hands of a working man, we slapped him on the back and, as we shared our soup with him, tried to find out how Hitler could have made him take up arms against us. That was at the beginning of the war. Now the war was over, and here was this German corporal whom we had found cringing in the corn, and not one of us was inclined to slap him on the back and speak words of encouragement to him. We could not find

it in us to say to each other, as perhaps soldiers had said to each other at the end of other wars: "You're a soldier and I'm a soldier and it is not we who are to blame but those who forced us to shoot one another; let them answer for it." Something else lay between us: the guilt and responsibility of each individual was measured by different standards this time.

But the people of this village and the farmer in whose house we were quartered seemed not to be aware of our feelings. Every morning when I sat down to breakfast, my belt and pistol holster slung over the wooden bedstead, the owner of the farm would appear with his pipe between his teeth to greet "Herr Ofizier". At first he came only to the door, but in a day or two he took a chair beside the table.

There he would sit in the slanting rays of morning sun, his legs crossed, sucking on a pipe whose metal lid was darkly stained with nicotine. He seemed to enjoy watching "Herr Ofizier" eat his breakfast; he had been young once himself and knew that a young man wants a good meal in the morning. His eyes twinkled with good humour. We could hear his wife's quick steps out in the yard and the clank of her enameled milk pail. She had borne him a son at the age of eighteen, and now, at the age of thirty-two, one could hardly believe she was the mother of that tall lanky boy, already half a head taller than his father. At times we thought he must be his son by another wife.

On the very day of our arrival the farmer asked me to allow him and his wife to spend the nights with relatives in the next village. He explained by saying his wife was still young and there were soldiers about. To allay any suspicions I might have, he promised to leave his son at home. Since he left all his household effects and livestock as well, I had no doubt as to why the boy was left behind.

The farmer and his wife usually went away to sundown, and for a long time after they had gone the rattle of the boy's keys could be heard in the barns and sheds. We paid no attention to him. My scouts would gather in the yard to watch the sunset and sing a two-part song about the Cossack who went to the war, and this song, which we had known from youth, went straight to our hearts here in Germany.

The farmer and his wife would come back in the chill of early morning. He came to say good-morning to "Herr Ofizier", she immediately set about her tasks in the yard,

stirring the mush for the pigs with plump red hands that were very quick and able.

My scouts lounged lazily in the sun while she rushed from the barn to the house and back again, leaving in her wake the smell of the manger, warm milk, and sweat; she would shoot glances at the boys and try to sweep their knees with her skirts as she ran past. With her hoop-like hips, powerful curves, and the puckered brow of a well-fed infant, she looked like a symbol of Content and Plenty standing at the entrance of the pigsty, her hands on her hips, her bare legs planted wide apart and half-hidden by the hogs swarming and squealing at the feed trough. Her husband was knotted and sinewy, with bony shoulders and big hands and a pipe in his mouth that seemed never to go out. But I thought I could detect a military bearing carefully concealed beneath his rustic appearance and slouch-like walk.

On the morning in question he sat at the table as usual and broached various subjects cautiously. As I glanced at him over the edge of my glass I felt a sudden wave of homesickness, as if we had been quartered in this neat little German village (which by some miracle had been spared the ravages of war) a hundred years instead of only six days. The one bright spot in my life this May morning was that a new motorcycle was waiting for me out in the yard. My scouts had brought it to me early in the morning and I had not yet set eyes on it.

I saw Magda, with her wrinkled, impassive face and steel-like arms, go past the window in thick-soled army boots, clutching a wet oaken tub to her belly. She had been working for our farmer since autumn.

She had had a husband. A Communist. He had been knifed in the back at a meeting. Late in life she had given birth to one child, a son. She had lived only for him. He had been killed on the Russian front in 1944.

Sleepy-eyed Margoslin, one of my scouts, shambled forth in bare feet and unbelted tunic and reached for the tub. She did not let go at first and they had a little tussle. Margoslin won. He lifted it easily to his shoulder and Magda followed in his footsteps, her face an ashen grey even in the sunlight. I watched them until they disappeared behind the shed.

Never had I seen my men offer assistance to the family in whose house we lived—neither to the wife with all her

voluptuous attractions, nor to the boy. The only one they felt sorry for, without stopping to analyse why, was old Magda who had lost everything in the war and now had to work for people who had gained rather than lost.

I finished the fried eggs I was eating out of the frying-pan and poured myself out another glass of wine. It was pale and transparent and so cold that the glass remained frosted for a long time after I had emptied it. Then I slipped my strap over my shoulder (the farmer watching my movements respectfully), buckled on my belt, delighting in the feel of my muscles and of the pistol on my hip, pulled my officer's cap to a jaunty angle, and went out into the yard. Judging by the pleasure I took in showing off in front of this German, a man is still very young at the age of twenty-two even if he has been through such a war.

The wine made the sunlight in the yard seem more dazzling than ever, and the motorcycle leaning up against the white wall of the house was a blaze of nickel and black enamel. I wheeled it, shaking and sputtering from the running motor, out of the yard, and as soon as my feet touched the pedals it fairly leaped out from under me and dashed up the steep country road to meet the bright blue wall of the sky. There could be no doubt that the war was over and we were in Germany—were here on behalf of all those who had fallen on the way. I gave my motorcycle as much gas as I could, and felt nothing but the wind on my teeth and a cold thrill of excitement in the pit of my stomach.

Over the hill was another village where Volodya Yakovenko, head of reconnaissance for another of our units, was quartered. He, too, had four scouts with him. When my race up the stony road through the woods brought me to the crest of the hill, I swooped down into the village street with a defeating roar of motor and exhaust. Trees, shutters, porches and front gardens were blurred by tears into two sunny streaks on either side of the road.

In front of me a heap of cobblestones marked a fork in the road. Yakovenko's house was on the right. As I took the turn at high speed, the motorcycle leaning perilously, a puppy ran out in front of me, heading straight under the wheel. It all happened so quickly that my hands worked quicker than my brain. I jammed on the brake and twisted the handle-bar. Instantly I found myself being

dragged in the dirt which I clutched at with both hands.

I jumped to my feet. A child of about three was standing in front of the house with the puppy in his arms. He did not run away, he just stood there gazing at me wide-eyed and pressing the puppy to his breast with all his might.

The fall had split my breeches at the knees and lacerated my hands. The twisted motorcycle lay on the heap of cobblestones with its back wheel whirling. I sat down on a stone. My knees were trembling. I spit the dirt out of my mouth. One thought formed vaguely in my mind: I might have been killed ... now ... with the war over. Yakovenko's scouts came running towards me. They took me to their house in pieces: first me, then my cap which one of the boys had found on the other side of the road.

While they pulled off my boots Yakovenko stood beside me with a glass of vodka in his hand.

"Drink it," he said. "No bones broken? Feel his bones, fellows. His skull, too. Does it hurt? Not here, either? You seem to be all right. No reason why you shouldn't drink it."

When the others had gone he sat down beside me on the bed. Only then did I notice how drawn and white he looked, and his breath smelt of vodka.

"I've been to see a concentration camp," he said. "It turns out there'd been a concentration camp here. Three kilometres away. I rode over last night."

He drew a hand across his forehead.

I knew that his father, commissar of a tank battalion, had been lost near Kiev in 1941. Two years later a man came to see his mother and told her he had been in a concentration camp with her husband. The man had escaped and run away from Germany, but Yakovenko's father had been too weak to make the attempt. He had asked the man to tell his family he was still alive. Yakovenko's mother had written him of this, asking him if he thought she dared believe it, dared hope.

Ever since then Yakovenko had cherished the secret hope of finding out something about his father when he got to Germany. The urge grew as the end of the war drew near.

Whenever we met people in striped suits, indicating that they had been freed from concentration camps, he would question them excitedly.

Last night he had seen a concentration camp for the first time. He himself had walked the blood-soaked path from the

camp gate to the crematorium, which hundreds of thousands of victims had trod before him. And he knew that if his father's footsteps were among all those others, no one would ever tell him about it.

"I saw a ditch there. Behind the crematorium." He suddenly went even whiter. "Flies swarmed above it. Bluebottles. I didn't understand at first. Then it came to me in a wave of horror. It was the smell, I guess. The ditch was full of human fat. When the bodies were burnt, the fat ran into the ditch."

He rocked back and forth, gripping his knees with his hands.

"There's only one hope: my father was a commissar, and they didn't take commissars prisoner. And then that man said the name was Yakovlev. Not Yakovenko, but Yakovlev. It may not have been my father at all. Mother never saw the man again."

What could I say to him? I assured him that it could easily have been a mistake, that no doubt it was, that I had heard of lots of similar cases. For instance, when our regiment fought its way out of enemy encirclement....

Yakovenko sat there rocking, his eyes closed, the skin paper-white on his cheek-bones, sweat beading his flushed temples and forehead.

That night I woke up and saw an enormous shadow on the ceiling—shoulders reaching from wall to wall and the head bowed between them. Yakovenko was sitting at the table with his head in his hands, his face lighted by two candles burning in a saucer. Seeing that I had waked up, he shuffled over in his bedroom slippers, still in his breeches and unbelted tunic, and sat down on the edge of my bed.

"They told me there that the ashes—the ashes of human beings—were carted away. They fertilised the fields with them...."

He rubbed his throat. His lips were dry and his voice hoarse.

"I went back. 'Did you know?' I asked them. '*Nein, nein,*' they said. 'Then come and look,' I said." His neck was red and distended. "They wouldn't come. They didn't want to know. Understand? People were burnt next door to them, their fields were fertilised with the ashes, and they go on eating the corn. I can't bear the sight of them."

He got up, the candles sputtered, the shadow of his arm darted up the wall to the shelf. He took a statuette off it and held it with the trade-mark to the light. "See this?" The trade-mark was French. In the quivering light various objects that were strikingly unlike looked down from the shelves at us. They had been taken from people's homes, had never seen one another before, spoke different tongues, and their original owners had probably been killed. Out in the barnyard were cows brought from Holland, pigs from Denmark. And a few kilometres away was the concentration camp. Perhaps it was there that the people to whom these things had once belonged were killed.

The next day the sight of the fields filled me with revulsion. Fertilised with human ashes. I could not bring myself to believe it, yet I could not drive the thought out of my mind.

We were going down-hill, and the scout held in the horses by pulling on the reins. I was lying on some straw, the sun was shining, and the labouring horses gave off the smell of sweat. Through chinks in the side of the cart I could see the countryside slipping past. Young corn, powdered with dust, rose out of the ash-grey soil. The swelling grains glistened in the sunlight. I could not bear the sight of that earth and that corn.

Pure white clouds were floating across the idyllic blue sky of Germany. Their shadows crept over the earth. Everything was quiet and peaceful. Yet how many people in this new world of peace were to resurrect only to bury their dead again, while a fortunate few would welcome home those they had thought dead.

We rode down the village street and turned into my yard, then the scout who had driven me over hurried back to join his fellows. I made for the house. None of my boys were about and the farmer and his wife slipped into the barn as soon as they saw me. I could hear them whispering to each other and from time to time I saw them glance at me excitedly. Something had happened in my absence.

I sat down on a bench under a window with my bruised leg outstretched and took out a cigarette. But I was wearing Yakovenko's breeches and had forgotten to put my lighter in the pocket. The farmer came towards me. I licked my finger and pressed down a scratch on my belt.

The farmer was even more polite than usual. Seeing the

unlighted cigarette between my fingers he instantly but unhurriedly, like an old friend, offered me a light. Then he sat down beside me with the air of one man chumming with another.

While lighting my cigarette I had noticed the farmer's wife dart into the pig pen. There was an expression of anger on her face, yet she looked cowed and as if ready to humble herself. Her husband had not noticed this. He sat smoking his pipe serenely while the sun shone down on us both where we sat on the bench under the window. Presently his son came over to us with a notebook and pencil in hand. He stopped in front of me and held up the notebook like sheet-music, clearing his throat as if about to sing. I looked up at him. When he began to speak he dropped his shoulders and stretched out his neck. He spoke so fast that I could catch only separate words, but these were repeated over and over. It seems that one of my scouts had shot a pig. "*Erschoß, erschöß!*" he kept saying, showing how it had been done.

Margoslin crossed the yard in a shiny new leather jacket. His slightly rolling gait showed that he was going out to reconnoitre and was filled with a sense of his own importance. The boy did not notice him. He said, his face blotched with excitement:

"It was a fine pig. It weighed thirty kilograms and was still growing. Thirty kilograms of first-class pork, each kilogram worth...."

Kosten was one of the words he kept repeating. I remembered it from childhood, when I had learned the little rhyme:

*Guten Tag, Frau Maier,
Was kosten die Eier?
Acht Pfennig. Acht Pfennig?
Das ist so teuer!*

Good old Frau Maier! In this war there was a General Maier, a hangman and sadist.

Leaning on his hands, his feet drawn under the bench, the farmer rocked back and forth. His bony shoulders were hunched, his head drawn in. He said not a word, merely listened with eyes closed and jiggled his smoking pipe between his teeth. I glanced at the hands gripping the edge of the bench. They were a labourer's hands, big and rough, and

there was dirt in the creases and around the nails. Dirt? Perhaps ashes?

The farmer sat jiggling his pipe while his son went over and over the calculations the whole family had made. It was important that I see they were not cheating me, that they were asking a very modest price for such good pork. The boy was white about the nostrils and his movements were nervous. Jerking the notebook up to his eyes, he read the name of the scout who had killed the pig. "*Soldat Makarushka*." Then he looked at me. I did not at first realise who this "*Soldat Makarushka*" was, the name sounded so foreign in his pronunciation. It was, of course, no other than our Makarushka, the youngest of our scouts.

One day he had come to us, a barefooted ragamuffin whose eyes said he was desperately hungry, and asked us to take him with us. Nobody in the village knew him, he had arrived there in the spring, before the snow had melted, barefooted even then and with blue goose flesh showing through the holes in his trousers. The village women had looked upon him as a half-wit and had fed him from time to time. His reputation as a half-wit had kept him from being sent to Germany.

He immediately felt at home among the scouts, but for a long time called us "*The Russians*", as the Germans and the people in occupied regions called our army. He was quiet and harmless and, after he had been properly fed, exceedingly strong. I don't remember who first christened him "*Makarushka*", but the name suited him, shy strong fellow that he was, and nobody remembered his real name. Once when we were on duty together at our look-out post, he told me about himself. He came from a partisan village. Almost all the men, including his father, had taken to the woods, but for some reason the Germans did not immediately punish their families. Then one night there was a round-up. All the inhabitants were driven into the school, the doors were locked and the building set fire to. Those who tried to escape by jumping out of the windows were shot. That is how his mother was killed. In spite of the unexpectedness of the round-up, some mothers had time to hide their children. Some of the population, too, managed to hide. They were searched for in cellars and outhouses and those who were found were taken at night to be shot. Makarushka carried his two-year-old

sister in his arms. They were lined up on the edge of a gully. Makarushka could not forgive himself for holding his sister in his arms.

"If I had put her down they might not have noticed her, she was so little and it was dark. But she was scared and hung on to me so tight I couldn't tear her loose. Dug her fingernails into me. Here." He pointed to his neck.

As long as he lives, I thought to myself, he will feel the nails of the two-year-old child whose tiny body was aware of the presence of death.

"It was still growing," the farmer's boy had said about the shot pig that weighed thirty kilograms. It was his pig and nobody had a right to shoot it. And the farmer, sitting on the bench in his felt slippers and jiggling his pipe between his teeth, was pleased with his son.

I glanced up at the boy. He was fourteen years old, his voice was changing, it cracked when he spoke. Makarushka had been just the same age when the Germans led him away with his sister in his arms to be shot, when he crawled out of the common grave and escaped to the woods where, like a wild beast, he found herbs to heal his wounds.

The fourteen-year-old farm boy had not learned the cost of war, but he knew very well the cost of a kilogram of pork. And here he was, standing in front of me with the bill in his hand, confident of his right to present it to me.

That evening we had pork for dinner. The farmer and his wife went away as usual, very much displeased with us. They avoided our eyes and the woman's face was inflamed from crying. The son remained at home and went about his usual tasks.

The sun went down behind the well-worked fields, its rays pierced by the pointed roofs. The bright glow of sunset quivered in the transparent air outside, but the room was already in shadow.

I heard the gate click and someone with an unfamiliar shuffling gait come in. From where I sat I could see only a corner of the yard. Presently a man entered my field of vision. He looked emaciated and dragged his feet after him, but made his way through the yard with an assurance that made me think he must have been here before. Going over to the pig pen, he stood gazing into its dark depth. He did not see the farmer's son watching him from behind the wood pile.

At one moment the boy was about to shout at him, but with a sudden change of expression, as if he had recognised the man, he repressed the impulse.

Now I heard footsteps coming up the porch. The window curtain cut off a view of the upper part of his body; I saw only his legs in mended shoes. Apparently it was painful for him to step on his right foot for he quickly transferred his weight to the left, dragging the right one after him.

For some time I heard his heavy breathing while he fumbled with the handle of the door. Finally the door was opened and he stepped inside. He was an old man in faded clothes of no definite colour and so ill-fitting that they could not have been made for him. The way in which he looked round the room made me feel again that he had been here before.

"How do you do," I said from out of the shadows.

He started and looked at me with an odd expression. It was not fear. When he had taken me in, he returned my greeting, pulled off the round cap issued to prisoners in concentration camps, and asked me something in Polish. I shrugged my shoulders. He made a sweeping gesture and again asked his question in Polish and German. He was looking for the farmer. I said he was living here but had gone away for the night. I was struck by the anxiety with which he awaited my answer.

"*Hier*," he repeated with relief, then thanked me in Polish.

I offered him a heavy oaken chair and when he sat down I was aware of the knobs of his knees sticking out. Now that I had a closer view of him, I saw he was not an old man at all, but one who had endured much suffering. There were hollows at his temples and his face was drawn and bloodless. I had just been given a plate of fried pork and potatoes, hot and savoury, and I could see that he was tantalised by the smell. His eyes kept turning to the plate. Perhaps I was in too much of a hurry to offer it to him, for he recoiled.

"*Nein, nein*," he said, shaking his head vigorously.

"Do have some," I insisted. "They'll bring me some more."

He pushed the plate away with a feeble hand. I no longer insisted, but I did not understand. Somewhat embarrassed, I poured him out a glass of wine. He thanked me with a look and eagerly drank it down, the hollows at his temples inflating and deflating as he swallowed, the hand holding the glass

showing almost naked cords at the wrist with bones fanning out to the fingers. It was dreadful to watch his exposed Adam's apple shifting up and down.

Before he finished he was seized by a racking fit of coughing, which left him blue in the face, breathless, with streaming eyes and shaking hands.

"Did you once live here?" I asked, sensing that he was ashamed of being so ill. "Have you been in this house before?"

He shook his head.

"A Pole," he said, explaining his presence here as one who had been forcefully driven out of his native land.

"I wanted to see him." He tapped on the table with his fingers for a moment before he glanced up at me.

"My wife lived here. There." He pointed through the window at the barn. It cost him an effort to lift his hand. "I had a son here, too." Again he looked at me. "When he was born and let out a cry my wife put her hand over his mouth so that no one should hear. But only the dead can be hidden. One day when she was nursing the child the German came in. He didn't say a word, just stood and watched her. She could not explain to me *how* he watched her, but she trembled all over and cried when she told me about it. What could I do? I was working for a German in the next village. What could I do? I was helpless."

His blue lips moved slowly, as if numb with cold. The faint light coming through the window was reflected glassily in his fixed eyes whose gaze was turned inward.

"Now I know how he watched her. He was feeding her so that she could work for him and the baby was sucking her strength. After that she always hid the child before going out to the fields. She said she could hear him crying when she was away, but I think this cry was always in her ears. Once she was so sure she heard it she came running back. The German was in the yard harnessing his horses to go visiting. The entrance to the pig pen was propped by a board. She rushed to it: she had a premonition. When she pushed the swarming pigs away, there lay our child. She could never see anything else after that. When she went entirely insane the German took her up the hill to the camp. To the crematorium. She did not understand, and that was fortunate."

My scouts were singing softly out in the yard while he told

me the story in a mixture of German and Polish. I could hardly make out his face in the twilight—only the deep shadows formed by his sunken cheeks, and the glint of his deep-set eyes.

"I was in the camp for a year and a half, and I lived through it so that I could come back here," he said.

I remembered the look on the German boy's face as he watched him from behind the wood pile. I went to the window and called Margoslin. The song broke off suddenly and I could hear the squeak of an approaching leather jacket. Margoslin stopped and lifted his head: he was a short man.

"Bring the boy here," I said.

For almost ten minutes I heard voices and footsteps in the yard, behind the sheds, and in the neighbourhood of the house. By this time the darkness in the room was relieved only by the grey patches of the windows and a looking-glass hanging in a dark corner. As a matter of precaution I asked the Pole if he knew the village where the farmer and his wife had gone and if he could take us there. Then we sat waiting in silence. At last Margoslin came in. Just as I expected, he said the boy was nowhere to be found.

The four of us—the Pole, Margoslin, Makarushka and I—made our way through the woods. The upper half of the moon rose above the horizon, the lower half apparently caught on the ragged hills. The moon was enormous and copper-coloured and the hills were pitch black. When at last it wrenched free it quickly climbed the sky to the right of us, diminishing as it rose. It had soared high, transforming the world with its white light, when we first saw the village—the bluish walls of the houses, the wet shine of the steep tiled roofs, the coloured glass in the dark windows. We chose a back way. From the barnyards came the warm stagnant smell of mangers and manure; from down below, where a black stream glistened among stones, came the smell of dampness. Stone steps wet with dew led down to the stream.

Two of us kept watch over the house and barn while the other two went softly into the silent yard which, in the moonlight, seemed to have been swept clean. We climbed a wooden ladder into the hay loft. The dog barked until it was hoarse, clanking and pulling at its chain, but no lights appeared in the windows of the house and no doors were opened.

Two white feather mattresses gleamed on the straw in the darkness. They still held the imprint of bodies. We directed our pocket torches into every corner of the loft, the barn, the house, the yard, but we did not find those whom we sought. Nor did we find them the next day. Later we learned they had run away. All three of them. They had taken the road leading West.

The neighbours told us they were a bad lot.

"Why didn't you tell us that before?" we asked.

They shrugged their shoulders.

"We were afraid," they said.

Magda was the only one who said nothing about them, neither good nor bad. In general she said nothing. For several more days she came as usual early in the morning, fed the pigs, swept the yard, milked the cows, performed all the duties that mechanically bound her to life. All the pails and milk cans were filled with milk that gradually went sour.

No doubt the farmer's family shudders at the remembrance of those few May days. The boy was only fourteen years old at the time and his voice was changing. Now his voice has become deep and strong, and in this deep strong voice he and his like are declaring their grievances.

On a May morning soon after the cessation of hostilities a slender lad of fourteen stood in front of me with a bill in his hand. I can see him to this day—his nostrils white, his face blotched with excitement. He did not care what his country had done, he did not want to know; he was interested only in being paid for the pig. And never for a moment did he doubt his right to present his bill.

1962

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

K. Paustovsky

(b. 1892, Moscow—d. 1968,
Moscow)

Konstantin Paustovsky wrote about nobility of mind, goodness, trust, friendship, compassion, and the love of nature.

The characters in his early works are romantically-minded, and one of his first novels is, in fact, called THE ROMANTICS. The characters in his other works, KARABUGAZ (1932) and KOLCHIS (1934) have real jobs to do, but jobs with a romantic appeal: they are taming the wilds for the benefit of man.

In Paustovsky's historical stories, lofty feelings and nobility of character are also predominant. Konstantin Paustovsky was one of those writers who sought to disturb the reader, to make him respond emotionally to what is happening.

In the post-war years, Paustovsky worked on the many volumes of his autobiographical epic, A LIFE STORY (1945-1963), consisting of six long stories and giving a vivid, colourful picture of Russia during the First World War and the Revolution. The wealth of facts, the many

known and unknown incidents and people, the fine touches and details, make this work a true chronicle of the epoch. But Paustovsky's talent as a painter in words probably comes over most effectively in the lyrical miniatures. His short stories are unforgettable, not because of the plot, but because of the profound inner nobility of feeling and thought with which they are imbued.

A Basket of Fir Cones

The composer Grieg was spending the autumn in the forest around Bergen. All forests are beautiful with their rustling leaves and scent of mushrooms, but those that stretch down mountain slopes to the sea have a particular charm. They ring with the sound of waves breaking on the shore. Mist is constantly rising from the sea and the abundant moisture encourages the exuberant growth of moss. It even hangs down from the branches in green braids that touch the ground.

These forests are also inhabited by a lilting echo, like a mocking bird, that lies in wait to catch the slightest sound and send it cascading down the cliffs.

One day Grieg met the woodman's daughter, a little girl with pigtails and a basket, collecting fir cones in the forest. It was autumn and if you could have collected all the gold and copper in the world and fashioned it into thousands of fragile leaves they would still be only a tiny fraction of the burnished splendour that lay on the slopes, and would look crude beside the real leaves, particularly those of the aspen. A bird's song is enough to make aspen leaves quiver.

"What's your name, little girl?" Grieg asked.

"Dagni Pedersen," she replied in a low voice. It was shyness not fear that made her speak quietly. She could not be afraid of someone with such friendly twinkling eyes.

"What a pity," said Grieg. "I haven't got anything to give you—not a single doll, ribbon or velvet rabbit."

"I've got my mother's old doll," the little girl replied. "Once she used to close her eyes like this."

She closed her eyes slowly and as she opened them again Grieg noticed a flash of leaves in her greenish pupils.

"But now she sleeps with her eyes open," said Dagni sadly. "Old people always sleep badly. Grandad groans all night as well."

"I know what, Dagni," said Grieg. "I'll give you something interesting. But not just yet—in about ten years time."

Dagni threw up her hands.

"That's an awfully long time!"

"The thing is, I've got to make it first."

"What is it?"

"You'll find out."

"Do you mean to say that you can't make more than five or six toys in your whole life?"

Her voice was very stern and Grieg felt embarrassed.

"No, it's not that," he replied somewhat at a loss. "I can probably make it in a few days, but it's not the right sort of thing for little children. I make presents for grown-ups."

"I won't break it. I promise," pleaded Dagni clutching at his sleeve. "Grandad's got a glass boat that I dust and I've never once even chipped it."

"Dagni has put me in a tizzy," thought Grieg and then said what grown-ups always say when they find themselves in a difficult position with children:

"You're still very young and there are lots of things you don't understand yet. Just be patient. Now let me carry that basket. It's much too heavy for you. I'll see you home and we'll talk about something else."

Dagni handed over the basket with a sigh. It really was heavy. Fir cones weigh much more than pine cones because they have a lot of resin.

When the woodman's house appeared between the trees, Grieg said to the little girl:

"You can manage on your own now, Dagni Pedersen. There are lots of little girls with your name in Norway. What's your father's name?"

"Hageroop," she replied, then frowned and asked:

"Won't you come in for a minute? We've got an embroidered tablecloth and a ginger cat and the glass boat. I know Grandad will let you pick it up."

"Thank you, Dagni, but I haven't got time now. Good-bye."

Grieg patted the little girl on the head, then turned and walked off towards the sea. Dagni watched him go, pouting. She had tipped her basket and the fir cones were falling out of it.

"I'll write a piece of music," Grieg decided. "And on the title page I'll ask them to print the words. 'To Dagni Pedersen, daughter of Hageroop Pedersen, the woodcutter, on the occasion of her eighteenth birthday.'"

* * *

Everything in Bergen was just as it had always been. Grieg had got rid of anything that could muffle sound, like carpets,

door-curtains and upholstered furniture, a long time ago. Now there was nothing left but the divan. It could seat up to ten guests and Grieg did not dare throw it out. His friends said that his house looked like a woodman's cabin. The only decoration was the grand piano. A person with imagination could hear the most magical sounds within these white walls, from the roar of the Arctic gathering up its breakers in the darkness and the wind whistling its wild saga over them, to a little girl singing her rag doll to sleep with a lullaby.

The piano could sing about love, about people's urge to do great things, about everything under the sun. Rippling under Grieg's powerful fingers the black and white keys would pour out a torrent of yearning, laughter, passion and anger and then suddenly subside. A single faint note echoed on in the silence like Cinderella crying because her sisters had been nasty to her. Leaning back Grieg would listen to this last note until it died away in the kitchen where a cricket had taken up residence some time ago. Then he began to hear the water dripping from the tap, counting off the seconds with the precision of a metronome. It was saying that time waits for no man and that you must hurry to do everything you have planned.

Grieg spent more than a month writing the music for Dagny Pedersen. Winter had come and the town was tightly furled in mist. Rusting boats would arrive from other countries and doze by the wooden quaysides, puffing quietly. Soon the snow came and Grieg would watch it drive past the window and cling to the treetops.

It is impossible to put music into words however rich our language may be. Grieg was writing about happiness and the delight of being a young girl. As he wrote he saw a girl with shining green eyes rushing towards him breathless with joy. She put her arms round his neck and pressed her warm cheek against his grey, unshaven one.

"Thank you," she said, not knowing yet what she was thanking him for.

"You're like the sun," Grieg would tell her. "Like a gentle breeze and early morning. A white flower has bloomed in your heart and filled the whole of your being with the fragrance of spring. I have seen life. Whatever people may tell you always remember that it is amazingly beautiful. I'm an old man now, but I have given my life, work and talent to

the young. I have given away everything and perhaps this has even made me happier than you, Dagni.

"You are a White Night with its mysterious light. You are happiness itself. You are the first glimmer of dawn. Your voice makes the heart leap and tremble.

"May everything that surrounds you be blessed, everything that touches or is touched by you, everything that gives you joy and cause for meditation."

Grieg put all these thoughts into his music. He had the feeling that others were listening to his playing and tried to guess who they were—the tomtits on the tree outside, the carousing sailors from the port, the washerwoman next door, the cricket, the snow falling from the low sky and Cinderella in her patched dress.

All of them were listening in their own way. The tomtits were excited, but no matter how they fidgeted and twittered they could not drown the playing. The carousing sailors sat on the steps below listening with tears in their eyes. The washerwoman straightened her back, wiped her red eyes and shook her head. And the cricket crept out of the crack in the tiled stove and peered at Grieg through a chink in the wall.

The falling snow would hang suspended in the air to catch the rippling strains of music. Smiling Cinderella looked down at the floor where a pair of glass slippers stood by her bare feet. The slippers were jerking and tapping against each other in time with the music wafting out of Grieg's room.

They were all dearer to Grieg than the polite, smartly dressed concert audiences.

* * *

Dagni left school when she was eighteen and her father decided that she should go and visit his sister Magda in Christiania. Let the girl (her father still thought of her as a girl, although Dagni was now a slim young woman with heavy fair plaits), let the girl have a look at the world and enjoy herself a bit. Who could say what the future held for her? Perhaps a husband, upright and devoted, but also mean, close-fisted and dull. Or a job as shop assistant in the village store. Or work in one of the many shipping offices in Bergen.

Magda made costumes at the same theatre where her husband Niels worked as a wigmaker. They lived in a tiny attic in the theatre with a view of Ibsen's statue and the

brightly coloured flags of the ships in the fjord. All day long the boats hooted through the open windows. Uncle Niels had studied them so carefully he maintained he could recognise all their voices—the *Norderner* from Copenhagen, the *Scottish Minstrel* from Glasgow or the *Jeanne d'Arc* from Bordeaux.

Aunt Magda's room was full of bits and pieces for costumes: brocades, silk, tulle, ribbons, lace, old-fashioned felt hats with black ostrich feathers, gypsy shawls, grey wigs, jackboots with bronze spurs, swords, fans and creased silver shoes. All this had to be sewn, mended, cleaned and ironed.

The walls were covered with cuttings from books and magazines: cavaliers from the age of Louis XIV, beautiful ladies in crinolines, knights, Russian women in sarafans, sailors and Vikings with oak wreaths on their heads.

A narrow staircase led up to the room which always smelt of fresh paint and gilt lacquer.

* * *

Dagni was fascinated by the theatre and used to go there frequently, but she found it difficult to get to sleep after seeing a play and sometimes even cried lying in bed. This worried Aunt Magda who used to try and comfort Dagni by telling her that she must not believe everything she saw on the stage. On hearing this Uncle Niels would call Magda a "broody old hen" and say that on the contrary you should believe everything in the theatre, otherwise people would not need theatres at all. And Dagni went on believing.

Nevertheless Aunt Magda insisted that Dagni should go to a concert for a change. Niels did not object to this. "Music is the mirror of genius," he said. Niels was fond of making obscure, high-flown statements. He said that Dagni was like the opening chords of an overture and that Magda had a magical power over people, because she made theatrical costumes. Everyone knows that when a person puts on new clothes he changes completely. This explains how the actor who was a foul murderer yesterday can be an ardent lover today, a court jester tomorrow and a popular hero the day after.

"Don't listen to all that awful rubbish, Dagni," Aunt Magda would exclaim on these occasions. "He doesn't know what he's talking about, that garret philosopher!"

It was a warm day in June, the time of the White Nights,

and open-air concerts were being held in the City Park. Dagni set off for the concert with Magda and Niels. She had wanted to put on her only white dress, but Niels had said that a beautiful girl should always dress in contrast to her surroundings. His long lecture on this subject boiled down to the fact that it was essential to wear black on White Nights and, conversely, appear in dazzling white on dark nights.

It was impossible to argue with Niels, so Dagni agreed to wear a black dress of soft silky velvet which Magda had borrowed from the theatre wardrobe. As soon as she put it on Magda had to agree that Niels was probably right—nothing could have set off the young girl's pale face and long plaits flecked with tints of old gold better than this mysterious velvet.

"Look, Magda," said Niels quietly. "Dagni is as lovely as if she were going to her first rendezvous."

"Quite true. Only I don't remember meeting any dashing handsome young man when we had our first rendezvous, you old chatterbox!" said Aunt Magda and kissed him on the forehead.

The concert started after the traditional firing of the old cannon in the port at sunset. Although it was evening neither the conductor nor the players switched on the small lamps over their music stands. It was still so light that the lamps in the lime trees had clearly been lit for effect rather than illumination.

This was the first time that Dagni had heard a symphony and it had a strange effect on her. The transitions and crescendoes conjured up a host of dream-like images. Suddenly she started and looked up. It had sounded as if the thin man in tails who was announcing the items had mentioned her name.

"Did you call me, Niels?" she asked her uncle, looking puzzled as she saw the expression on his face. He was staring at her with a mixture of wonder and delight. So was Aunt Magda who had her handkerchief raised to her lips.

"What's the matter?" asked Dagni.

Magda clutched her arm and whispered:

"Listen!"

Dagni heard the man in tails announce the following:

"Ladies and gentlemen! Some members of the audience sitting at the back have requested me to repeat my

announcement. The next item in our programme is a piece by the celebrated composer Edvard Grieg dedicated to Dagni Pedersen, daughter of Hageroop Pedersen, the woodcutter, on the occasion of her eighteenth birthday.”

Dagni sighed so deeply that it hurt her chest. She was trying to hold back the tears which were welling up, but it was no good. She leant forward and covered her face with her hands. At first she could hear nothing because of the turmoil inside her. Then she finally heard a shepherd’s horn ringing out in the early morning and the quivering reply of a host of strings. The tune swelled, rose, raged like the wind sweeping over the treetops, tearing off the leaves, whipping up the grass and casting cool spray into the face. Dagni felt the wave of fresh air surging from the music and forced herself to calm down.

Yes, it was her forest, her own native land with its mountains, the sound of horns and the murmuring sea. Glass boats foamed the water with the wind whistling in their rigging. Then this sound gave way to the tinkling of bluebells, the trill of birds somersaulting in the air, children’s halloos, and the song of a girl whose lover has thrown a handful of sand at her window at dawn. Dagni had heard this song in native mountains.

So that grey-haired old man who had helped her carry the basket of fir cones home had been Grieg, the great musician. And she had reproached him for not being able to work quickly. And this was the present he had promised to give her in ten years time!

Dagni wept without attempting to conceal her tears of gratitude. The music now seemed to fill all the space between the earth and the clouds over the city. Its waves sent a faint ripple over the clouds revealing the stars. The music was now a call. It was calling Dagni to follow it into that realm where sorrow can never quench love, where no one will destroy another’s happiness and where the sun shines like a crown on the head of a fairy godmother.

Suddenly a familiar voice rang out in the flood of sound: “You are happiness itself. You are the first light of dawn.”

The music died away and the applause began, slowly at first, and then rising to a great crescendo. Dagni got up and made her way rapidly to the exit from the park. Everyone was looking round at her. Perhaps some of the audience had

guessed that this young woman was the Dagni Pedersen to whom Grieg had dedicated his immortal work.

"He's dead," she thought. "Why?" If only she could see him! If only he would suddenly appear here! How her heart would beat as she rushed towards him, put her arms round his neck and pressed her moist cheek against his, whispering: "Thank you!" "What for?" he would ask. "I don't know," she would reply. "Thank you for not forgetting me, for your generosity, for showing me the beautiful things that give meaning to our lives."

Dagni walked through the deserted streets, not noticing that Niels was following her trying to keep out of sight. He had been sent by Magda and was reeling like a drunken man, muttering something about the miracle which had happened in their ordinary lives.

Nocturnal dusk still hung over the city, but the northern dawn was touching the windowpanes with a faint gold. Dagni went down to the sea which was slumbering peacefully without the slightest splash of foam. She clutched her hands and let out a cry at the overwhelming sense of the beauty of this world which possessed her and which she herself did not fully understand.

"I love you, life," she said quietly.

Then she laughed looking with wide eyes at the lights of the boats rocking gently in the translucent grey water. Niels, who was standing a little way off, heard her laughter and went off home. He was no longer worried about Dagni. He knew that her life would not be wasted.

1954

Translated by Cathleen Cook

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent 'V' at the start and a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

(1905, Rostov-on-the-Don—d.
1973, Leningrad)

Vera Panova is particularly interested in the riddle of human individuality. Hers is the psychological approach. Behind the external commonplaces of life and the behaviour of ordinary people, she highlights what is out-of-the-ordinary and psychologically unique in her characters. She is to be credited with having written one of the most impressive works about the last war, the short novel *THE TRAIN* (1946), in which the crew of a hospital train make trips to the front to pick up the wounded and take them to city hospitals in the rear. She also wrote one of our best books about factory workers during the war, the novel *KRUZHILIKHA* (1947). Soon afterwards, her story, "The Clear Bank", about life in a village after the war, came out in 1949. After these works, new penetrating psychological novels, stories, plays, and historical narratives followed in quick succession. In each of them, Vera Panova showed great skill in fathoming the depths of the human mind.

Vera Panova's concern with children is probably due to her keen interest in the very foundations, the very beginning of a human being's formation. As meticulously as a scientist, but with the tender solicitude of a mother, she explores the mysterious growth of individuality in a person from the earliest years—in her long story, SERYOZHA (1955), for instance. Family relationships are a complicated subject, but Vera Panova takes one of its most complicated aspects: mutual relations in a family where the little boy has no father, and all the mother's attention, he feels, is being given to his stepfather. Vera Panova traces with unconcealed concern and love the way in which the big, grown-up man, by his human decency, honesty and sincerity, gradually wins the heart of the little man—wins it, and himself is captivated by the boy. A beautiful conquest and a beautiful captivity....

Vera Panova harmoniously combined masculine firmness and power of intellect with what is usually considered typically feminine subtlety in understanding human relations.

Seryozha

(An excerpt)

HOLMOGORY

Holmogory. That was a word Seryozha began hearing all the time when Korostev and Mummy were talking.

"Have you written to Holmogory?"

"Maybe I shan't be so busy in Holmogory, then I can take my political-economy exam."

"I've had an answer from Holmogory. There's a place in the school."

"They've rung up from the personnel department. It's all settled about Holmogory."

"Why take that to Holmogory? It's all worm-eaten." (About the chest of drawers.)

Holmogory. Holmogory.

Holmogory. It must be something very high up. Hills and mountains, like you saw in pictures.¹ People would climb from mountain to mountain. The school stood on a mountain. Children went sliding down the mountain on sledges.

Seryozha drew it all with red pencil, humming "Holmogory, Holmogory" to a tune that had come into his head specially for the word.

We must be going to live there, because they talked about the chest of drawers. Grand! The very best thing in all the world! Zhenka went away, Vaska went away, now we're going away. That makes us much more important that we're going somewhere and not stopping in the same place all the time.

"Is Holmogory a long way off?" Seryozha asked Aunt Pasha.

"Yes, indeed it is," said Aunt Pasha and sighed. "A very long way."

"And are we going to live there?"

"Eh, I don't know, Seryozha, I don't know all your arrangements."

"Do you go there on a train?"

¹ Holm—hill, gora—mountain.—*Tr.*

"Yes, a train."

"Are we going to Holmogory?" Seryozha asked Korostelev and Mummy. They ought to have told him themselves, they must have forgotten.

They looked at each other, and then looked away somewhere, and Seryozha tried to meet their eyes and couldn't.

"Are we going? We are, aren't we?" he insisted, puzzled. Why didn't they answer?

Then Mummy said in careful sort of voice: "Daddy's being transferred to work there."

"And are we going with him?"

That was a plain question and he waited for a plain answer. But Mummy started talking round and round, as she so often did. "How could I let him go alone? Look how bad it would be for him, all alone. He'd come home and nobody there—everything untidy—nobody to get him anything to eat—nobody to talk to. Poor Daddy would be quite miserable."

Then at last came the answer.

"So I'm going with him."

"And me?"

Why did Korostelev keep looking at the ceiling? Why did Mummy say nothing for such a long time, only caress Seryozha?

"And me?!" he cried in panic, stamping his foot.

"First of all, don't stamp," said Mummy, and stopped caressing him. "That's no way to behave. Don't let me ever see it again! And secondly—let's talk it over. How could you go just now? You've only just been ill. You're not properly well yet. The least little thing, and your temperature's up again. We don't know what it'll be like there, how we'll arrange everything. And the climate isn't right for you, either. You're just go on getting ill again and again and never pick up properly. And who'd I leave you with then? The doctor said you mustn't go just yet."

Long before she had finished he was sobbing, tears streaming down his face. They weren't taking him! They'd go themselves, and leave him behind! He hardly heard her last words through his sobs.

"Aunt Pasha and Lukyanich will stop here with you. You'll go on living just the same way you always have."

But he didn't want to go on living the same way he always had! He wanted to go with Korostelev and Mummy!

"I want to go to Holmogory!" he cried.

"Now listen, dear, stop, hush, don't go on like that," said Mummy. "What do you want with Holmogory? There's nothing special there."

"There is!"

"Why do you talk to Mummy like that? Mummy always tells you the truth. And you won't stop here all your life, you little silly, now hush, that's enough. You'll spend the winter here, and then in the spring or perhaps the summer Daddy'll come for you, or I will, and we'll take you there, just as soon as you're properly well and strong we'll take you, and then we'll all be together again. Just think, how could we leave you for long?"

Yes, but what if he didn't get strong again by the summer? And was it nothing, to wait the whole winter? Winter—why, there was no end to it. How could he bear it when they went away and he was left behind? They'd live there without him, a long, long way off, and they didn't care a bit, not a bit! And they'd travel in a train, and he'd have travelled in a train, too—but they weren't taking him! Everything mingled into one dreadful knot of injury and misery. But he could put it all only into the most simple words.

"I want to go to Holmogory! I want to go to Holmogory!"

"Give me a glass of water, Mitya, please," said Mummy. "Here, drink a little, Seryozha. Why, you mustn't get into such a state. However much you cry, it won't help. If the doctor says you mustn't go, that's the end of it. Now hush, now be a sensible little boy, hush, hush now.... Why, how often have I gone away without you, don't you remember, when I was studying and took my exams? I went away and came back again, didn't I? And you were quite all right here. And you never cried when I went away. Because you were quite happy without me. Don't you remember? Why are you making all this fuss now? Can't you do without us for just a little while, when it's for your own good?"

How could he explain? It had been quite different then. He had been little and silly. When she was not there he forgot about her, and had to get used to her again when she came back. And she had gone away alone, now she was taking Korostelev away from him. Then came a new, piercing thought—will they take Alec? He had to know. In a choked voice, through swollen lips he asked: "And Alec?"

"But he's tiny," said Mummy reproachfully, and got red. "He can't do without me, don't you understand? He has to have me. And he's not ill, he doesn't get temperatures or swollen glands."

Seryozha hung his head and cried again, but quietly, hopelessly.

He might have borne it if Alec had been left behind, too. But it was *only him* they were leaving. It was only him they didn't want.

"Left to my fate," he thought in the words of the fairy-tale about Tom Thumb.

His feeling of injury against his mother—a feeling that would leave a lifelong scar—was mingled with a sense of inferiority. It was his own fault, of course he was worse than Alec, his glands got swollen, so they were taking Alec and leaving him behind.

"Oh," groaned Korostelev and went out of the room. But he came back at once.

"Seryozha, come for a walk. In the woods."

"In this damp! We'll have him in bed again!" cried Mummy. Korostelev shrugged his shoulders.

"He's in bed half the time as it is. Come on, Seryozha."

Still sobbing, Seryozha followed. Korostelev helped put his outdoor things on, except for the scarf, he had to ask Mummy to help with that. Then hand in hand they went to the woods.

"You know," said Korostelev, "there's a little word—'must'. Do you think I want to go to Holmogory? Or Mummy? We don't. It's upset all our plans, everything. But we must—so we're going. And that's happened to me a lot of times."

"Why?" asked Seryozha.

"That's what life's like, Sonny."

Korostelev spoke seriously, sadly, and Seryozha felt just a tiny bit better because he seemed sad, too.

"When Mummy and I get there, well—we must start right away with our work and everything new to us. And there'll be Alec. We must get him into a nursery at once. But what if the nursery's a long way off? Then we must look for a nanny. And that's no joke either. And I've got exams hanging over my head, I must sit for them if I bust. Wherever you look, everywhere it's 'must'. But there's only one 'must' for

you—to wait here just for the present. Why should we make you share all those difficulties with us? You'd only get ill again, and worse than ever."

They needn't *make* him. He would be willing, glad, he longed to share all their difficulties. He could do the same as they did. And in spite of the earnest persuasiveness in that voice, Seryozha couldn't rid himself of the thought that they weren't leaving him behind just because he'd be ill, but because if he was, he'd be a nuisance. And his heart knew that nobody really loved could be a nuisance. And doubt in their love penetrated deeper into his heart, which had ripened for understanding.

They came to the woods. Everything was empty and dreary. The leaves had fallen, the dark nests on the bare boughs looked from below like badly rolled balls of black wool. Seryozha's boots squelched in the wet layer of leaves as he walked hand in hand with Korostelev, thinking. At last he said tonelessly:

"It's all the same, anyway."

"What's all the same, anyway?" asked Korostelev, bending over him.

Seryozha did not answer.

"It's only till the summer, Sonny," said Korostelev awkwardly after a pause.

What Seryozha wanted to say was something like this: I can think what I like, I can cry as much as I like, it'll all be the same. You grownups have the power, you can allow or forbid, you can give presents or punish, and if you say I've got to be left behind you'll leave me behind whatever I do. That is what he would have answered had he had the words. The feeling of helplessness when faced with the tremendous, boundless power of grownups crushed him.

From that day he became very quiet. He hardly ever asked: "Why?" He often went off alone, sat on Aunt Pasha's sofa with his feet tucked under him whispering to himself. He was still not allowed out very often. The autumn dragged on, damp and unpleasant, and his illness dragged on with it.

Korostelev was hardly ever with them. In the morning he would go away to "hand over". (That was what he always said now: "I'm handing over to Averkiev.") But he didn't forget Seryozha. One day there were new building-bricks beside the bed when he woke up, another time it was a brown

monkey. Seryozha dearly loved the monkey. It was his little daughter. And she was as beautiful as the princess. He said to her: "Well, Sonny." He took her with him on his make-belief trip to Holmogory. Whispering to her, kissing her cold nose of plastic, he put her to bed.

THE EVE OF DEPARTURE

A lot of strange men came, they moved all the furniture about in the dining-room and Mummy's room and packed it in bast matting. Mummy took down the curtains and pictures. The rooms looked dismal and hideous with bits of string littering the floor and with darker patches on the walls. Only Aunt Pasha's room and the kitchen were homely islands amid all this depressing ugliness. Bare electric bulbs shed a harsh light on bare walls, bare windows and scraps of reddish bast. Chairs were stacked one on top of the other, their scratched legs pointing to the ceiling.

At any other time it would have been wonderful for hide-and-seek. But not now.

It was late when the men went away. Everyone was tired and went to bed. Alec fell asleep, too, after his usual evening cry. Lukyanich and Aunt Pasha blew their noses and whispered in bed for a long time, till at last they were quiet, too; then came snores from Lukyanich and a thin nasal whistle from Aunt Pasha.

Korostelev, however, still sat alone in the dining-room by the bast-covered table, writing under the bare lamp. Suddenly he heard a sigh behind him. He looked round, and there stood Seryozha in his long night-shirt, barefoot, with bandaged throat.

"What are you doing here?" whispered Korostelev.

"Please," said Seryozha, "Korostelev, dear Korostelev, take me with you, please take me, too, please, please!"

He broke out in heavy sobbing, trying to hold it back so as not to waken other people.

"But look here, Sonny, what's this," said Korostelev, picking Seryozha up in his arms. "You know you mustn't run about barefoot on this cold floor. You know it, don't you? And haven't we talked it all over and agreed about it?"

"I want to go with you to Holmogory!" Seryozha sobbed.

"Why, your feet are quite cold, you see now," said

Korostelev. He wrapped the bottom of the night-shirt round Seryozha's feet, and gathered up the little shaking body. "What can we do when things turn out this way? You see, you're not well."

"I won't be ill again!"

"But as soon as you're really well, I'll come for you right away at once."

"Will you *really*?"

"I've never lied to you yet, Sonny."

No, he hasn't, thought Seryozha, but of course he does lie sometimes, they all do.... What if this is the time when he's lying to me?

He clung to that firm masculine neck, prickly under the chin, as his last refuge. Here, in this man, was his main hope and protection and love. Korostelev carried him up and down the room and whispered—all that nocturnal talk was in whispers: "I'll come for you, and then we'll go in the train. The train goes very quickly. And the coach is full of people. And before we know it we'll see Mummy waiting for us. The engine will whistle."

He'll have no time to come for me, and Mummy'll have no time, either. Every day people will come to him, or they'll telephone him, and he'll always have to go to work, or take exams, or walk up and down with Alec, and I'll go on waiting and waiting for ever.

"—there's real forest where we're going to live, not just little woods like here. With mushrooms and berries growing wild."

"And wolves?"

"That I can't say. I'll find out about the wolves and write you a letter. And there's a river, we'll go bathing. I'll teach you to do the crawl."

But what if it really will be like that, thought Seryozha, weary of doubts. Perhaps it will.

"We'll make fishing rods and go fishing. Why, look out there, it's snowing!"

He carried Seryozha to the window. Great white flakes were floating gently down, some of them smashing softly on the glass.

Seryozha looked at them. Worn out, he quietened, his feverish cheek pressed to Korostelev's face.

"Here's winter come at last. You'll be able to play out of

doors all the time, and go sledging, the time'll pass so quickly you won't notice it."

"Oh, but—" said Seryozha, wearily worried, "the rope on my sledge is awful bad, will you put a new one on for me?"

"Right you are. I'll see to it. And you, Sonny, promise me one thing, not to cry any more. It's bad for you, and it upsets Mummy, see? And anyhow, it's not proper for men. I don't like that sort of thing. Now, promise—you won't cry any more, will you?"

"Uhuh," said Seryozha.

"That's a promise? Word of honour?"

"Uhuh."

"Well, remember. A man always keeps his word!"

He carried the exhausted Seryozha, slumping heavily in his arms, back to Aunt Pasha's room, put him into bed and tucked him up. Seryozha drew one more long, quivering sigh and fell fast asleep. Korostelev stood looking at him. In the light from the dining-room his face looked very small and pale. Korostelev turned away and went out on tiptoe.

THE DAY OF DEPARTURE

Then the day of departure dawned.

It was a dull, dreary day, without either sunshine or frost. The snow on the ground had melted in the night and only a thin layer remained on the roofs. The sky was grey. Underfoot it was wet and muddy. Sledging? Why, it was unpleasant even to go out into the yard.

How could you hope for anything in weather like that?

How could there ever be anything good again?

But all the same, Korostelev had put a new rope on the sledge. Seryozha looked into the entry and saw it.

But Korostelev himself had disappeared.

Mummy sat nursing Alec. She kept on and on. And she smiled and said to Seryozha: "Look what a funny little nose he has."

Seryozha looked. Just an ordinary nose. She likes his nose because she loves him, thought Seryozha. She used to love me, but now she loves him.

So he went to Aunt Pasha. She might have a million superstitions, but she would stay with him and she would love him.

"What are you doing?" he asked dully.

"Can't you see for yourself?" she said. "I'm making rissoles."

"Why are you making such a lot?"

Raw meat rissoles smothered in bread-crumbs filled the whole kitchen-table.

"So there'll be enough for dinner for us all, and plenty for them to take on the journey, too."

"Will they go soon?"

"Not very. In the evening."

"How many hours is that?"

"Oh, a lot. It'll be getting dark when they go. As long as it's light they'll still be here."

She went on making rissoles, and he leaned his forehead against the edge of the table, thinking. Lukyanich loves me, too, and he'll love me more, he'll love me an awful lot. I'll go with Lukyanich in a boat and I'll get drowned. Then they'll bury me in the ground, like Great-Granny. And Korostelev and Mummy'll hear of it, and they'll be so sorry, they'll say—why didn't we take him with us, he was so clever for his age, and such a good boy, he never cried and never got on your nerves. A million times better than Alec. No, I don't want them to bury me in the ground. I'd be frightened lying there all alone. And we'll have a good time here, too. Lukyanich'll bring me apples and chocolates, and I'll grow up and be a sea captain, and Mummy and Korostelev will be down and out, and one fine day they'll come and say: "Give me your wood to saw", and I'll tell Aunt Pasha: "Let them have yesterday's soup."

Here Seryozha felt so unhappy, so sorry for Korostelev and Mummy that he began crying. But Aunt Pasha had barely time to say: "Oh, heavens above!" when he remembered he'd given his word to Korostelev.

"I won't cry any more," he said quickly.

Granny Nastya came with her black bag.

"Is Mitya at home?" she asked.

"He's gone about a car," said Aunt Pasha. "Averkiev doesn't want to give him one, just think, what a brute."

"Why a brute?" asked Granny Nastya. "In the first place, he needs the car for the farm. And secondly, he's given them a lorry. That's far better, because of the luggage."

"For the luggage, of course," said Aunt Pasha. "But a car

would have been better for Maryana and the baby.”

“People are spoiled these days,” said Granny Nastya. “In my young days we didn’t have cars or lorries either to take children about, and we reared them just the same. She can sit with the baby beside the driver, and they’ll be quite all right.”

Seryozha listened, blinking slowly. He was filled with the sense of this parting, a parting which nothing could alter. It was as though everything in him was tensely prepared to endure the approaching grief. Whether in a car or a lorry, soon they would go, they would abandon him. And he loved them.

“Why’s Mitya gone so long?” said Granny Nastya. “I wanted to say goodbye to him.”

“Aren’t you going to see them off?” asked Aunt Pasha.

“I have a conference,” said Granny Nastya and went to Mummy. Then everything was quiet. The day outside became a deeper grey and the wind rose. It made the window-panes rattle and shake. Thin ice with white lines covered the puddles. The snow started again, whirling quickly in the wind.

“How many hours now?” asked Seryozha.

“A little less,” Aunt Pasha answered. “But still quite a lot.”

Granny Nastya and Mummy stood talking in the dining-room, among the piled-up furniture.

“Where on earth can he be all this time,” said Granny Nastya. “I want to say goodbye to him, who knows if I’ll ever see him again.”

She’s afraid, too, that he’ll go away for ever, thought Seryozha, and never come back any more.

Then he saw it was nearly dark, soon they would have to put on the lights.

Alec began to cry. Mummy ran to him, almost bumping into Seryozha on the way.

“Why don’t you find something to amuse yourself with, Seryozha dear?” she asked kindly.

He would have been glad to amuse himself; he tried conscientiously to play with his monkey, then with his bricks, but it was no good. It wasn’t interesting, nothing seemed to matter. The kitchen door banged, there was a stamping of feet and Korostelev’s loud voice.

“Let’s have dinner. The lorry’ll be here in an hour.”

“Didn’t you get the car then?” asked Granny Nastya.

“No. They can’t spare it, they say. What’s it matter? We’ll just go on the lorry.”

Habit gave Seryozha a feeling of gladness on hearing that voice, he wanted to run in, but then came the thought: Soon there’ll be nothing more of all this—so once more he started moving his bricks aimlessly about on the floor. Korostelev came in, his face red with the cold outside and said apologetically: “Well, Seryozha?”

They had a hasty dinner. Granny Nastya went away. It got quite dark. Korostelev went to the telephone and said goodbye to somebody. Seryozha leaned against his knee, hardly moving, and Korostelev drew his long fingers through Seryozha’s hair as he talked.

Then driver Timokhin came in.

“Well? All ready?” he asked. “Give me a spade to clear the snow away, or we won’t get the big gates open.”

Lukyanich went with him to open the gates. Mummy picked up Alec and started busily wrapping him in a quilt.

“There’s no hurry for that,” said Korostelev, “he’ll get too hot. Time enough yet.”

He and Timokhin and Lukyanich began carrying out the packed things. Every now and then the open door let in a cold breath. They all had snow on their boots, nobody wiped his feet and Aunt Pasha did not scold them, she knew there was no sense in wiping your feet just now. Pools of water gathered on the floor, it was wet and dirty. There was a smell of snow, straw and tobacco mixed with an animal smell from Timokhin’s sheepskin. Aunt Pasha ran about giving advice. Mummy, still holding Alec, went up to Seryozha, put one arm round him, pressed his head to her. He moved away. Why did she bother to hug him when she wanted to go away without him!

Everything was carried out, the furniture, the suitcases, the basket of provisions, the bundle of Alec’s nappies. How empty the rooms looked! Nothing left but some scraps of paper and an empty medicine bottle lying on its side. You could see the house was old, the paint on the floor was worn off, it looked new and fresh only in the places where the whatnot and chest of drawers had stood.

“Here, put this on, it’s cold outside,” Lukyanich said to Aunt Pasha and handed her a coat. Seryozha jumped in alarm and ran to him.

"I'm going out, too! I'm going out, too!"

"Of course, of course, you shall," said Aunt Pasha soothingly, and helped him on with his outdoor things. Mummy and Korostelev were getting theirs on, too. Korostelev put his hands under Seryozha's arms, lifted him up and kissed him hard.

"Goodbye for the present, Sonny. Get well, and remember what we agreed."

Mummy started kissing Seryozha and crying.

"Seryozha! Say goodbye, darling!"

"Goodbye, goodbye," he said quickly, breathless with haste and agitation, looking at Korostelev. And he had his reward.

"Good lad, Seryozha," said Korostelev.

Mummy was still crying. She said to Aunt Pasha and Lukyanich: "Thank you for everything."

"Nothing to thank us for," said Aunt Pasha mournfully.

"Take care of Seryozha."

"You needn't worry about that," said Aunt Pasha still more mournfully, and suddenly cried: "You've forgotten to sit down! We must all sit down a minute!"

"But where?" asked Lukyanich, staring about.

"Oh, heavens above," cried Aunt Pasha, "come into our room, then."

They all went in, sat down here and there for some reason and waited in silence for the traditional few moments. Aunt Pasha was the first to rise.

"Well, God be with you," she said.

They went out and down the steps. It was snowing and everything was white. The big gates were wide open. A lantern with a candle inside hung on the shed wall, and the snowflakes whirled in its light. The loaded lorry stood in the middle of the yard. Timokhin was covering everything up with canvas. Shurik was helping him. A good many people were standing about—Vaska's mother, Lida and a lot more, all came to give Korostelev and Mummy a send-off. Seryozha felt as though he were seeing them all for the first time. Everything round him seemed strange, unknown. Voices sounded strange. The yard was not like his own yard. It was as if he had never seen that shed before. As if he had never played with those children. As if this man had never given him rides on this same lorry. As if nothing of it all had ever been *his*, and nothing ever could be, for he was abandoned.

"It's going to be bad driving," said Timokhin in his stranger's voice. "Slippery."

Korostelev put Mummy and Alec in the seat in front and wrapped a shawl round them. He loved them more than anyone else, he took care of them, he saw to it that they would be warm and comfortable. He himself climbed into the back and stood there, tall as a statue.

"Get under the canvas, Mitya," Aunt Pasha called out. "Under the canvas, or you'll have the snow in your face."

He took no notice.

"Seryozha, move back there a bit," he said, "or we'll run over you."

The lorry snorted. Timokhin got in. The lorry snorted more and more loudly, trying to move. There, it gave a jerk, then slipped back; then it went a little bit forward and back again. Now it would go, the gates would be shut, the lantern would be put out, and it would all be over.

Seryozha stood on one side, under the falling snow. With all his strength he remembered his promise and only sobbed now and then—long, desolate, almost soundless sobs. And one single tear forced its way out of his eye and shone in the light of the lantern, a difficult tear, not a baby tear, but the tear of a boy, a bitter, burning, proud tear.

No, he could not wait there any longer, he turned and walked to the house, bent with grief.

"Stop!" Korostelev called in a desperate voice, and drummed on the back of the driver's cab. "Seryozha! Come on! Quick! Get your things together! You're coming with us!"

He jumped down.

"Hurry up! Bring them along—clothes, toys, what else? Won't take a minute. Come on!"

"Mitya, what are you thinking of! Mitya, think what you're doing! Mitya, you're crazy!" said Aunt Pasha from the door and Mummy from inside the lorry. He answered angrily:

"Oh, rubbish. What d'you think this is? Can't you understand? It's like vivisection. Do as you like, but I can't stand it. That's flat."

"Oh, heavens above, it'll kill him there!" cried Aunt Pasha.

"Rubbish," said Korostelev again. "I'll take the responsibility, understand? It won't kill him at all. That's all your nonsense. Come on, come on, Seryozha."

He ran into the house.

Seryozha could not move at first. He could not believe it, he was afraid to believe it. His heart beat so loudly he could hear it. Then he dashed inside, ran panting through all the rooms, caught up his monkey as he passed, then had a sudden desperate fear that Korostelev might change his mind. Mummy and Aunt Pasha might talk him round, and rushed back to him. But Korostelev hurried to meet him saying: "Quick, quick!" And they began collecting Seryozha's things. Aunt Pasha and Lukyanich helped. Lukyanich folded Seryozha's bed up.

"It's right what you're doing, Mitya," he said, "you're absolutely right, good lad!"

Seryozha feverishly scooped up any of his treasures that came to hand and tossed them into the box Aunt Pasha gave him. Quick! Quick! Or they might go! You could never know what they might do the next minute. His heart seemed to be beating in his throat, so it was hard to breathe or hear anything.

"Quick, quick!" he cried while Aunt Pasha bundled him up. He tugged to get away, looking for Korostelev. But the lorry was still standing there, and Korostelev had not even got in, he told Seryozha to say goodbye to everybody.

Then he picked Seryozha up and pushed him in beside Mummy and Alec, under Mummy's shawl. The lorry began to move, now he needn't be afraid any more.

It was crowded in the driver's cab—one, two, three, four people, think of that! There was a strong smell of sheepskin. Timokhin was smoking, too, Seryozha coughed. He sat wedged in between Mummy and Timokhin, his cap was down over one eye, his scarf was too tight round his neck, he could see nothing but the snow dancing in the light of the headlamps. It was cramped and uncomfortable, but who cared? We're going, we're going all together, our Timokhin's taking us, and at the back there, high up, there's Korostelev, he loves me, he takes the responsibility for me, he's out there in the snow but he put us in the cab, he'll take us all safely to Holmogory. Oh, heavens above—we're going to Holmogory, how wonderful it is! I don't know what's there, but it must be lovely!... Timokhin's horn sounded warningly, and the gleaming snow rushed straight towards Seryozha.

V. Kochetov

(b. 1912, Novgorod—d. 1973,
Moscow)

Vsevolod Kochetov, a well-known figure in the literary world and public affairs, wrote several books that were notable for their fighting publicistic spirit. His best work, which has won a prominent place in the history of Soviet literature, is a novel about a dynasty of shipbuilders *THE ZHURBINS* (1952). The novel portrays the life of several generations of a working-class family, whose biographies and characters reflect the major events of Russian history through many decades. But for all the differences in the personalities that make up the Zhurbin family—from its patriarch Old Matvei to the youngest grandson Alexei—they have something in common that unites them not only as a family, but also as members of a large collective, and this something is the serious and dedicated attitude they have to their work, as the biggest and most important thing in their lives.

A popular film, *BIG FAMILY*, was scripted from the novel.

Kochetov was also well-known as a journalist and literary critic.

The Zhurbins

(An excerpt)

There were two Zhurbins whom the news of the addition to the family, in spite of the noisy salute, did not reach when it should have done. While Ilya Matveyevich's salvoes thundered, these two sat at the table in a little house at the far end of the Old Settlement and battled at draughts.

One of them was the brother of Ilya Matveyevich, born exactly a year after him, and so like Ilya Matveyevich that people at the shipyard were always mixing them up. Vassily Matveyevich was also going bald; he, too, gave no peace to his eyebrows, and round his short, powerful neck the collars of ready-made shirts never joined, just as they never joined round his brother's.

The other—with a thick grey beard up to his eyes, a beard which still retained flecks of its former jet black, and was usually hopelessly tangled—resembled an ancient sinewy lion, full of wisdom and knowledge of life. This was the patriarch, the head of the family, the father of the Zhurbin brothers, Matvei Dorofeyevich Zhurbin, "Old Matvei".

Every Sunday and every holiday he came to see Vassily Matveyevich, and stayed there until late at night. Officially, the purpose of these visits was to discover what was going on in the world. Vassily was a member of the works trade union committee; from such an eminence he should see and know everything. But there was another, secret purpose—and this was the main one—and for many a year it had not been given its proper name. Old Matvei's experience of life had taught him that however well his family treated him, however much they cared and looked after him, his old man's fads and ailments were nevertheless a drag on them, and that by the end of the week they had usually had enough of him. He would go off to Vassily's supposedly in search of news and explanations which he could have got at home, but actually because he wanted to give Ilya, Agafya, his grandsons and their wives a rest.

At Vassily's they were always glad to see Grandad. Even at seventy-eight he was not the kind of tiresome old man who spreads gloom over the surrounding company. He liked to grumble and "lecture", but what of it! He knew a thousand

amazing stories. Even Vassily's irritable and not too good-natured wife, Maria Gavrilovna, would melt when he embarked on his story-telling.

It really was surprising: the years passed but Grandad's stories seldom repeated themselves. When asked if he did not invent some of the stories, Old Matvei would answer: "Life's a better story-teller than you or me."

They often invited Old Matvei to the trade school: he had plenty to tell the lads about the hard life the working man led in the old days. Matvei would go to the boys and start recalling the little village of thatched cottages somewhere in the Tver province, and his father Dorofei, of whom he was the eleventh child and therefore an unwanted one, just another mouth to feed. He would recall the day when his mother died, and how his father, almost before the last sod was laid, told him that he was to be sent to the town as an apprentice.

That had been a memorable apprenticeship. Three years he spent in the basement of the tinsmith's workshop of "Master Otto Bismarck"—as the battered sign over the entrance proclaimed. He learnt to cut keys in a vice, to solder kettles, to tin samovars and saucepans. And though he really liked working, producing with his own hands things that were useful, he longed to be a boy again. By the time he was thirteen Matvei had stopped longing. He seemed to have no other interests, no desire to go anywhere.

One day the deacon of the cathedral brought in an outlandish object—a bronze cage shaped like a cupola, and inside on a perch sat a little bird about the size of a goldfinch with bright red feathers. The deacon turned the key underneath the cage, the little bird fluttered its wings, let out a life-like chirp and stopped.

"You see," said the deacon, "it won't go any more. It's broken. And how it used to sing, just like a canary! It was a gift from the worthy Maria Felixovna of Strepetovo. A priceless gift. Nothing will console me if it is ruined forever. I call upon you to restore it to life, Otto Karlovich. There will be no bounds to my gratitude."

The master and his best craftsman, Ivan Gusev, locked themselves up in the master's apartment, worked on the cage from morning to night for eight days. All this time Matvei could not work; he thought of nothing but the little bird

that startled his boyish imagination. Was it really made by human hands? Now, *that* must have been a craftsman! He had heard it said there were people in the world with hands of gold. Well, only hands of solid gold could have fashioned that red-feathered wonder.

On the ninth day the master dumped the cage down on the table where the finished jobs were kept, cursed all and sundry in one breath, and went out, slamming the door with such violence that everything jumped and rattled on the benches. Ivan Gusev explained:

“Otto is furious. The trouble isn’t that the bird won’t sing and that he’s losing money, he says, it’s the loss of prestige to the firm.”

Matvei was seized by a desire to look inside the bird, to take it to pieces and discover the secret of the wonderful singing.

By good fortune—it turned out to be his bad fortune later on—the deacon did not come to the shop for a long time and the cage was left standing among the finished saucepans and samovars. And every night when the men had gone to sleep, Matvei would creep through a window into the workshop, light a candle, and cog by cog, spring by spring, joint by joint, he would dismantle and examine the mechanism of the bird.

The sleepless nights began to tell on him: he would stumble about, swaying like a drunk, and his head would nod over the bench. He kept thinking, if only he had one more night the bird’s secret would be his. But the deacon up and took the bird away. And the next day he returned and shouted at the master that the bird was completely ruined. One of the craftsmen said he had seen Matvei working on the cage—and the boy got his marching orders. Where was he to march to? Home, of course, to father. Sixty versts on foot. Matvei started out, but he did not cover even a quarter of the distance. In one of the villages he collapsed and lay for three long weeks in the cottage of a kind-hearted old widow. They said it was a fever.

When he got on his feet after the illness he realised for the first time what a valuable treasure he had brought with him in his hands and in his head from the foul, stinking workshop of Otto Bismarck. He started with repairing the locks in the cottage of the old woman who had taken care of him; then, when he grew a little stronger he had various calls from the

old woman's neighbours—they had all kinds of jobs to be done too. Matvei went from house to house, then from village to village. Little by little he got together a primitive tool-kit in a canvas bag, and then went about tinning, soldering and sharpening. He felt no urge to go home to his father and brothers. Matvei Zhurbin, without knowing it himself, had become a worker, a proletarian who had nothing to loose, because all his wealth was in his hands, his hammer-bruised and acid-stained working man's hands.

In those years such hands were needed everywhere. The Russian aristocracy was retreating before the industrialists and the businessmen; country houses were giving way to factories. And when Matvei reached St. Petersburg he was at once taken on at a shipyard as a fitter. But he could not stay in one place for long. He had grown used to the vagabond life that seemed so free after the German tinsmith's shop. Matvei shifted from factory to factory, from mill to mill, searching all the time for something, and not really knowing what it was. He changed his trade, learned to handle a turner's lathe, learned the boiler-maker's trade, the smelting trade; he went to sea as a stoker and saw foreign lands—Borneo, Singapore, India, Japan, South America.

At twenty he was recruited into the army, a Dragoon Regiment, which was stationed at Lomza, in Poland. His job, because of his skill as a locksmith, was that of assistant to the regimental armourer. Work in the armoury suited Matvei down to the ground. He took such an interest in it that in a year or two he became an armourer himself. When the inspectors arrived, the regiment's guns would always be in perfect condition. The commander, of course, was pleased and did not grudge encouragement, often letting him have his own way. And when an event took place that would have landed anyone else in real trouble, Matvei Zhurbin came out of it quite unscathed.

The old man did not tell the young trade-school lads about this period of his life; how can you tell such things? It was there, at Lomza, that he got to know a young Polish girl, the daughter of the local cabinet-maker, Jadzia Luczynska. The Dragoon was a strapping, black-browed young fellow with big eyes. The Polish girl was slim, fair-haired, and her eyes were blue. They fell in love but couldn't be together. And to make matters worse, cabinet-maker Luczynski betrothed his daugh-

ter to Pan Skripka, a school-master in the town. But Matvei did not give in. His worker's life had taught him a lot: life is a fight, if you stand gaping it'll knock your head off; if you show your mettle and don't hesitate—you come out on top.

On the snowy morning of the day Jadzia was to be married to Pan Skripka, a train of sledges for carrying the wedding party to the church was already drawn up outside the Luczynskis' front porch when a troika of Dragoon regimental horses galloped up to the back door. Jadzia—just as she was, in her wedding dress, bridal veil, and white sequined slippers—dashed straight down the steps into the sledge, and the horses plunged into the snowstorm and galloped away along the snow-bound forest roads.

By the time the house realised what had happened, all trace of the bride had vanished in the flurrying snow. Sledges chased one way and the other, firelocks and pistols letting fly at random.

But the Dragoon horses raced on and on, carrying Jadzia, wrapped in a sheepskin coat, Matvei and two of his messmates forty versts away to a village where the frightened priest of an Orthodox church, roused from his midday nap, hastily converted the bride from Catholic to Orthodox and performed the marriage rites.

The event stirred the whole neighbourhood.

The regimental commander, an old cavalry swordsman, took the view that Matvei had committed one grave offence: a rank-and-file soldier getting married when he was serving in the regiment. The rest was not an offence but an escapade!

"With your way of carrying on, Zhurbin, you ought to be serving in Her Majesty Maria Fyodorovna's Life Guards," he said. "Damn it all, you've run off with the finest beauty in Poland, you blockhead! Fair as a princess, she is. Five days detention for you, my friend."

Somehow or other the matter was hushed up. Matvei was given sergeant's stripes so that he could live out of barracks in a rented flat, and that was the end of it. Or rather the end of it was that the parents put a curse on their daughter and disowned her.

But neither Jadzia nor Matvei were daunted by parental anathema. Jadzia turned out to be a wonderful needlewoman. She made dresses for the ladies of the regiment, who came to value her work more highly than that of the most fashionable

Warsaw dress-makers. In those days the Zhurbin family flourished.

A few years before the dawn of the new century, Jadzia gave birth to a son, Ilya, and, a year later, to a second son, Vassily. A third son was born during the first days of the Russo-Japanese War. At the same time came a misfortune that wrought a sharp change in the life of Matvei and his family. On the testing range a rifle blew up in Matvei's hands. The soldiers carried their armoured in from the range, thinking that he was dead; blood was pouring from a wound near his temple. When Jadzia ran to the hospital, the army surgeon told her that her husband would probably not live, and if he did, would remain an invalid for life.

The regiment was soon recalled from Poland. Matvei was discharged from the army; he did not die, but for months on end he lay in bed, half-blind and half-deaf. Jadzia saw that the surgeon's words might come true—Matvei was an invalid; but she loved him and would not leave him. Jadzia had to work doubly hard to support the family. If there were no orders for her as a dress-maker she would sew plain sacks. She worked with swollen fingers all day and late into the evening. At night, when the children went to sleep, she would sit beside Matvei, sing him Polish songs and tell him old-time folk stories. And he would be lulled into a doze by her voice.

The youngest boy died. Jadzia buried him herself. And again she worked on to keep the others, to keep Matvei.

She slaved like that for two and a half years until Matvei rose from his bed. When he was well again he took her and the children to St. Petersburg. Trouble was brewing, it was a time of black-lists and political banishments, of lock-outs and unemployment, of police terror. With the greatest difficulty Matvei succeeded in finding a job as a stoker in an ocean-going ship. While he was at sea his family lived poverty-stricken in a barrack-like hut on the dockside.

The poverty and sufferings of his wife and children drove Matvei almost to suicide. Only his love for his wife saved him. Returning from his voyages, Matvei would all but run home, and, before kissing the children, would take up his Jadzia in his arms, like a baby.

Jadzia was nearly thirty but had kept her beauty. It seemed, rather, to reach its peak in these hard years, and even the rough stevedores, whose inhuman toil had made them

indifferent to most things in life, were on their best behaviour in the presence of stoker Zhurbin's wife, and awkwardly, but with deep sincerity, used "noble" words that came strangely from their lips.

Was this the way his queen should live, thought Matvei when he looked at Jadzia in a dress that had been washed and patched more times than she could count. He did not "go on the spree" in foreign ports; he did not drink or play cards like the rest—he saved every kopek out of his stoker's wage, brought home cheap ornaments and trinkets, and on one occasion made a great effort and brought back from Bombay something really worthy of a queen—a huge Cashmere shawl. The shawl hid all the defects in Jadzia's clothes. Jadzia loved and treasured it.

In August 1914 Matvei was called up into the navy. Twice his ship was torpedoed by the Germans, and both times he fought so stubbornly for his life that death could not overcome him. Jadzia was the beacon light towards which he struggled from the Baltic waves. And when his comrades persuaded him to enter their underground circle, where they discussed the way by which Matvei Zhurbin, a proletarian, might win a better life, there, too, he thought of his Jadzia, and dreamed of winning a better life for her. He was over forty, but he still could not forget how Jadzia had turned her back on the plenty that the well-to-do schoolmaster had offered her, how trustingly she, a seventeen-year-old girl, had left her own home, cursed by her parents, and given all her love to a simple Russian soldier, how she had sat for years at his bedside; Matvei could still hear her tender lullabies.

The guns of the "Aurora" thundered. Matvei Zhurbin took part in the landing near the Nikolai Bridge; under a hail of rifle and revolver fire he hurled down the frenzied counter-revolutionary officers from their positions on the marble steps of the palace; clinging to the mudguard of a bucketing lorry, he raced through the streets of Petrograd. His personal life—Jadzia—was gradually blending together in his heart with that immense life with which revolutionary Russia was surging from end to end, and which concerned every one of the proletariat without exception. He himself did not notice when this process began. With the marine detachments he marched north and to the Volga, then he returned

to Petrograd to storm the rebel fort of Krasnaya Gorka.

There, in the forests on the coast beyond Oranienbaum, he met his sons—Ilya and Vassily, with the same ribbons as his on their caps: "Baltic Fleet". When the forts were captured, the Zhurbins went home all together.

Jadzia was ill with typhus, dying. They could not save her; for her the good life they had won had come too late.

There were no boards for a coffin. Matvei wrapped his wife's wasted body, so light and cold now, in the Cashmere shawl and carried her in his arms for the last time. Trusting neither Ilya nor Vassily to do this, he carried her alone to the grave.

When he had heaped on the earth, he sat down and wept. The beacon light was out, all ahead was dark.

His sons wept too. But they had not loved their mother as he had loved her; they could not have loved her like that—they were young and selfish. In time they would have their own beacons, but his was quenched for ever.

Matvei's grief and loneliness reached such a pitch that they turned into anger and bitterness against those who had not disappeared from the face of the earth in time, who had yet to be smashed and destroyed, hurled down from their marble parapets.

He rose from the ruins of his life and marched away with heavy tread, with grief and hatred in his thick-browed eyes. On and on he marched, over the Donbas, the shores of the Black Sea, the Crimea.... His sons went their own way too, but they met again in Petrograd. This time his sons were not alone. Ilya brought back from his campaigning a little weaver from Ivanovo, Agasha, Agafya Karpovna, and Vassily returned with Marika, Maria Gavrilovna, the daughter of a rich Tambov peasant. Matvei felt differently towards each of the two young wives. He would look quizzically at the "merchant's daughter", as he had already dubbed Marika in his mind—was she anything to compare with his unforgettable Jadzia! What had Vassily found in her? But Agafya touched his heart. Yes, there was something of Jadzia in her, very little, but there was something. She was gay and loving and warm-hearted.

And when at the call of the Party the whole Zhurbin family, their battles over, left Petrograd for the distant river Lada, to rebuild a shipyard there, Matvei Dorofeyevich took up his

quarters with Ilya and Agafya on Anchor Street, while Vassily, sensing his father's dislike of Marika, went to live separately. But the years passed, Marika found her feet in a working-class family; under Vassily's influence her character changed considerably; she shook off the kulak spirit, and little by little Matvei Dorofeyevich got used to Marika. Now he would go to see her and Vassily every holiday, a thing he would never have done twelve years ago. True, there was no way of describing his attitude to Vassily's wife other than that he had "got used to her". He was fond only of Agafya Karpovna—Agasha. Sometimes looking at Agafya and Ilya, Old Matvei would become lost in thought. And then he would be sad all day until night-time, until he would see his Jadzia in a dream. And he always saw her in that white bridal gown she had worn when she dashed into the Dragoon sledge long, long ago on that snowy morning.

1950-1952

Translated by Robert Daglish

L. Leonov

(b. 1899, Moscow)

Leonid Leonov was sixteen when his poems, reviews and notes began to appear in the newspapers. During the Civil War he was a front-line newspaperman. After demobilisation, he continued with his newspaper work in Moscow, and in 1922 his highly original short stories, fairy tales and novels began to appear in print. He achieved widespread recognition with his novel BADGERS (1924), a large-scale realist work describing dramatic episodes from the revolution in the Russian countryside.

Leonov's actively anti-philistine, anti-bourgeois outlook on the world found its frank reflection in his next novel, THE THIEF (1927). Beginning with this work, Leonov scrutinised with special interest the social and moral depths in the minds of people, trying to interpret what is happening from the highest philosophical pinnacles.

He wrote social and philosophical works one after

another—novels *THE RIVER SOTT* (1929), *SKUTAREVSKY* (1932) and *ROAD TO THE OCEAN* (1936)—striving to combine profound penetration into the human mind with fruitful experiments in artistic technique which give the maximum density to the lyrical narrative. Leonov succeeded in conveying the great break-up being accomplished not only in the country, but above all in the souls of the people who took part in rebuilding life.

Leonov also made a name for himself as a playwright. His was the psychological approach.

All Leonov's searchings and discoveries in form and content seem to have been synthesised in his biggest and most important novel, *THE RUSSIAN FOREST* (1953). The basic conflict is the collision between the two types of scientists, the forester Vikhrov and his antagonist Professor Gratsiansky. Vikhrov has fought all his life not merely to preserve, but to increase the natural resources of his country. For him, the Russian forest is not just timber to be felled for industrial purposes, but something much bigger. For him, it is the source of the humanly beautiful, truly fullblooded life of the whole people. For Gratsiansky, however, an uncreative academic, the people do not matter in his branch of science; his aim is to strengthen his position as an infallible authority. He is one of those people who, themselves incapable of fathering new ideas, parasitise on the achievements of truly productive scien-

tists—while constantly denying what those scientists affirm.

In the struggle with Gratsiansky, Vikhrov reads his famous lecture on the Russian forest to some young people, many of whom must leave for the front on the following day. He affirms that love for one's country is also love for its natural life, for its history. Serving science, he serves his country....

Academician, Lenin Prize winner and Hero of Socialist Labour, Leonid Leonov has made a signal contribution not only to the development of Soviet literature but, what is just as important, to the development of social thought in his homeland.

The Russian Forest

(An excerpt)

The next morning the weather in Moscow was fair, with a mild south-westerly breeze; Polya had cold shivers of excitement, although she was wearing the blue jumper her mother had knitted for her before her departure. She came to her father's lecture with a full hour to spare, and strolled for a long time about the walks of the Institute's plantation until she was drawn into the stream of young people, all as immature and excited as she was. No one demanded a pass or a student's card. Polya ascended to the second floor by the worn stairs, which had water barrels standing on the landing; she passed down a barrack-like corridor, which had a rather ill-kept look because of the numerous notices posted up on its walls, and entered the lecture-hall together with the others. It was a dingy room with black benches arranged amphitheatrically, but the bright foliage outside the window, irradiated by low sun, was reflected in the old parquet and the heavy low-hanging ceiling, and the effect tended to dispel one's first impression of academic frigidity and gloom. Although it was wartime, the place was packed; the introductory address was intended for the freshmen of all the faculties. From what she overheard around her Polya also gathered that the undergraduates of the senior courses and even the teachers of the related subjects came there on that day; Polya ascribed this to the lecturer's notoriety.

She found a seat right at the top, near the ceiling, which was scribbled over with pencilled notes, and her sunburnt neighbour, a girl-student just back from her summer practice, promptly shared with her rapturous reminiscences of a similar lecture the year before, when the walls of the building, as she put it, were pushed aside, as it were, and the audience had such a real feel of dense cowberry-carpeted pine forest that it seemed as if in another minute or two the birds would start singing in defiance of the established rules and decorum of the lecture-hall. Polya thawed somewhat in the consolatory warmth of those words: gratefully she noted that after Varya this was decidedly the most sensitive and educated girl in the world.

Polya began to take stock of her surroundings. Way below, facing her, stood a shabby ink-stained table with a thick glass and a water-bottle on it, green in the reflected light of the window; the wall behind it was crowded with portraits of bearded patriarchs of Russian forest lore, and by the door, leaning against a physical map of the country, stood a specimen tree with cuts made on its trunk at regular intervals. And nothing more, except a sand-box and a young man in an asbestos helmet who was pacing up and down imposingly in front of it. The helmet was respectfully snatched off, however, when the hum of voices died down and a short brisk old man with grizzled temples and a rumpled little beard appeared at the table. His old lustrine coat had a greenish shine on the side that was turned towards the window. Polya found it hard to get used to the idea that this was her father. He started off in a somewhat old-fashioned manner, using figurative turns of speech that sounded quaint in such an official place, but without the false fervour Polya had so feared; for one thing, he avoided figures, since these were likely to tax the untrained attention of the new students. Evidently, the war, too, had something to do with the professor's avoidance of his usual landscape digressions. Now and then he would pause over some inaccordant phrase, his fists resting on the table while he peered at his audience as if searching for possible opponent in the hushed rows before him, but a kind of close-drawing sincerity grew as he warmed to his subject, and, imperceptibly, the lecture turned into a heart-to-heart talk between an old forester and his future associates.

It may have been because facing him sat tomorrow's soldiers that Vikhrov's opening words sounded hesitant; in addition, the lecturer's voice proved to be a low and rather husky one, so that Polya missed the opening.

"What did he say?" she asked the neighbour on her right, a prim elderly woman, who presented a disagreeable contrast to the excited young generation.

"You're interrupting my work, Comrade!" the stenographer snapped, shaking Polya's hand off her sleeve and dashing off strange unintelligible symbols in her writing pad.

People began hissing at them, and Polya froze into silence, as though afraid someone might read her secret fears.

"Only four days ago," Vikhrov was saying, "our army

abandoned yet another Soviet town, Dnepropetrovsk, before the onslaught of a stubborn and—in the light of greater history—thoughtless enemy. Our minds are far removed from the subject which has brought us together here beneath the turbulent sky of our capital. But the whole thorny path of development of matter, from the amoeba to proud thinking man, inspires us with confidence that there will be yet another victory of light over darkness, of reason over brutality, and that the day is not far off when the knowledge you will have accumulated will be needed more than ever by the people who have sent you here. Let your work be guided by love for your country and gratitude to those brothers and sons of ours who are now bearing the brunt of history's ordeal on the battle-fronts.

“I am fully aware of the responsibility of my task, which is to engage your attention with a talk on such a specific, though important, subject as the Russian forest amid the thunder of the greatest war in history. The most cherished and urgent affairs are thrust into the background in face of the danger that is threatening the Soviet people and the very springs of its existence, the forest included. Yet you have not come here to listen to a lecture on field surgery or the tactics of infighting, you have come to hear a brief sketch about the role of the tree in Russian life, about the intelligent activity demanded of the patriot in this most neglected branch of our economy, which never enjoyed the public attention it deserves, and about certain questions of forestcraft, which are still debatable and whose solution is a problem of the greatest urgency if we are not to endanger the welfare of future generations. In this building you will learn to grow new forests and tame wild uncurbed stands in order to harness them effectively into the chariot of the socialist economy; you will study in practice both the relation of the forest to climate, soils and environment, and the enormous changes which this interplay produces, an exceedingly intensive interplay measured by centuries; here you will come to appreciate how important organisation and strict control are in this seemingly inexhaustible storehouse of Nature, from which men have always drawn as much as they could take away. The forest is the only source of wealth, open to everybody, upon which Nature, through kindness or craft, has not hung her weighty padlock. She entrusted this treasure, as it were, to man's

good sense, in order that he shall carry into effect here that fair-planned system which she herself is unable to carry out. In short, within the next five years you will acquire skills and knowledge justifying the terrible, deadly power of the axe. But in order to be of the greatest use to your country, good intentions or a cursory acquaintance with the theory of forest management are not enough. Unless you study the past you cannot map out the highroad into the morrow, for human experience feeds on the memory of errors committed.

“You all know how vast time seems to us in childhood, when the day lasts an eternity, and no matter how much of it you spend on marvellous voyages and discoveries there is always ten times as much left. A boundless space, as it were, lies spread before the child, and it seems as if no wings can possibly carry you to the edge of it. So it was at the dawn of the Russians, when after being encamped for five centuries in the Carpathians, the hitherto united Slav tribe spread from there to all four parts of the world; our people chose the East. One day all was silenced—the creak of carts, the wail of infants, the bellowing of the oxen—and our ancestors for the last time gazed down from the eagle heights upon the immense space that spread before them, lost in the morning mist. A beautiful untrodden valley lay between the three mountain ridges, and rivers trimmed with green furs flowed through it in slow-paced majesty. Only the song of the *bayans*¹ and the foresight of the old men could foreglimpse through the blue mists of the horizons and the unborn centuries the train of majestic events which followed the making of Russia. Probably it happened in the morning and early in the summer, when our country looks its best. On the right, alternating with leafy woods, stretched the steppe, its lush luxuriant grass rippling in the wind, while on the left towered a vast pine forest, almost a taiga, which ran down from the Alaun Upland in several arms; the widest of them, the Dnieper arm, reached the shores of the Cimmerian, now the Black Sea. Thousands of smiling little lakes, noticeably increasing in number towards the north, gleamed in the sun, for the earth still bore the traces of the comparatively recent (in point of geological time) glacial spring. Then the forefather

¹ *Bayan*—ancient Russian minstrel.—*Tr.*

of Svyatoslav¹ gave the sign, and the tribe, like a flame, leapt down and flooded the deserted foothills. Thus the first line of our history was recorded with thousands of ponderous iron-bound wheels. That morning may have lasted a century, but everything that concerns the unknown is believable.

“Notice how the economic conditions of life will work with Nature in modelling the appearance of these people. No one pampered them from childhood. Nature relaxed her rigours for only three months in the year. Never were they to know the carefree joys of life which had been bestowed upon the West-European nations from their cradle by the proximity of the sea, the warm currents, and the mountain ranges, that reliable defence against barbarian invasions and the caprices of climate. Our people were to be scorched by the Asiatic sun, and chilled by the Arctic frosts, and this was to tell in the extremes of the national character. The sharp fluctuations in the continental temperature were to develop in them a tremendous capacity for performing cyclopean deeds in the briefest space of time; their thousand-year struggle for national identity was to cultivate in them a silent heroic fortitude capable of enduring any suffering, while the country’s economics was to urge them to seek a seaway commensurate with their strength and natural gifts. Similarly, the almost unchanging face of Nature throughout all the twenty parallels and the absence of any natural barriers were to determine their striving towards unity, which was the most reliable guarantee of all-Slav independence. The remoteness of a foreign disintegrating civilisation was to make them create their own—a brilliant and inimitable civilisation. The crafts and shifting cultivation were to lead them by river ways to all parts of the mainland. In fierce battles with the steppe dwellers they were to defend their young State, and steel their valour and their no less celebrated endurance in the process. That is how we began.

“It would be ungrateful not to mention the forest among the educators and all-too-few patrons of our people. As the steppe cultivated in our ancestors a love of freedom and the heroic sport of single combat, so did the forest teach them caution, keenness of observation, diligence, and that heavy stubborn tread with which Russians have always moved

¹ Svyatoslav—Prince of Kiev, ruled in 945-972 A. D. A distinguished military leader.—*Tr.*

towards the goal they had set themselves. The forest was our home, and perhaps no other element of Nature has set so strong a stamp upon the life of our ancestors. The tree is raw material fit for immediate use, and any piece of sharpened iron set on a handle converted it into a valuable item of primitive existence. A better way of expressing its role is to say that the forest greeted the Russian at his birth and attended him through all the stages of his life—with the cradle of the infant and the first booting, with the nut and the wild strawberry, the peg-top, the steam-bath switch and the balalaika, the splinter that did service for lamp in the peasant's hut, and the painted shaft-bows, with the wild honey and the beaver dam, the fisherman's or the naval boat, the mushroom and incense, the staff of the wanderer, the coffin hollowed out of a log, and, lastly, the wooden cross on the grave covered with fir branches. This is a list of the earliest Russian wares, the other side of that civilisation's medal: bast and boards, beams and chutes, wheel rims and bark, charcoal and bast, pitch and potash. But the same forest yielded a flow of richer gifts: fragrant Valdai bast matting, gay Ryazan sleds and Kholmogory chests lined with sealskin, honey and wax, sables and black fox for the dandies of Byzantium.

“With the growth of human needs the forest opened up its coffers with increasing generosity, and no wonder that our timber industry today employs more hands than any other respectable branch of Soviet economy. Could it be because we have been living too long on full forestial board and lodging that this Russia of ours has remained wooden for so long?

“It is to that remote period that we owe the birth of our contradictory attitude towards the forest—a mixture of exaggerated maudlin affection and indifference, if not neglect, and sometimes sheer hostility towards it, a feeling we have inherited from our ancestors. When we do get down one day with a vengeance to the great business of forest regeneration we shall first have to teach our left hand to respect the work of the right one, and cultivate in our children habits of thrift and care for the forest, that gift of Nature, which is unable to fly away from its offender to the safety of the skies, or, like the exasperated gold fish of the fairy-tale, to plunge into the watery chasm, or, at the worst, write frantic reports to those

in authority. Let us hope, that, planted by our own hand, it will become dearer to us than an inheritance. Apparently, too great an abundance of forestlands became an obstacle to the development and settlement of a propagative and active nation; on the other hand, its shift towards the north diminished the importance of overseas commerce and enhanced the role of agriculture, which was hampered again by the forest. The axe was powerless to fight the thickets, which came creeping up from all sides, and so the first woodcutter in ancient Russia was the fire. The peasant burned the felled summer-dried trees in the clearing, thus fertilising the virgin soil with ash, and ploughed the reclaimed land to barley; on the Volga it was turnips, and in my native parts flax; he harvested two or three crops, then gave the cut-over area a rest, let it lie fallow, leaving it to the sun and rain to heal the wounds he had inflicted.

“And so the forest fed, clothed, and warmed us, Russians. In the course of time, when the molten human lava from the mother volcano of Asia will have descended upon ancient Rus together with the hot dry winds and the locusts, the forest will be the first obstacle in its path. There was no barrier against the wicked shedders of blood, as the chronicler expressed it, other than the people’s will for defence and the impenetrable thickets, which served as a trap for the foe. There, on the margin of the forest-steppe, those earliest fortification works of ancient Russia were to arise—terraces built of rough-hewn timber and packed with earth, from behind which it was so convenient to shoot at a frenzied target curvetting on a horse, tarred parapets behind ditches, snug stockades and citadels, which, from the fourteenth century, were to be called kremlins, and, finally, the abatis, which survive to this day: a chain of magnificent leafy forests stretching for hundreds of miles with trees laid flat in front of them like a breakwater to check the advancing cavalry.

“The hordes and scorching winds that sprang up on the plateaux of Mongolia and Tibet moved clockwise with the centre somewhere across the Volga, while the Russians moved eastward in the same direction with the slow steady thrust of a battering ram, settling for all time on the high bluffs of the Siberian rivers, to which they were anchored by their fathers’ graveyards and man’s natural attachment to the place where he first saw the light of day or shed his blood in

hand-to-hand battle. Two centuries later, prime Voronezh oak, larch, and the northern pine, converted into the ship's frames and stern-posts of the Russian fleet, were to carry our pennants across all the seas, so that if old Father Urals today receives nation-wide tribute for his socialist machines of peace and war, it would only be fair to grant the Russian forest a share, however slight, in the thunderous glory that was Hankoudd and Corfu, Sinop and Çeşma....

"There is scarcely another nation which has entered history with such a rich coniferous mantle upon its shoulders. To the distinguished foreign emissaries who travelled through our country to see the magic mysteries of the East, ancient Russia was a dense thicket with occasional gaps in it formed by human settlements. Hence arose our dangerous reputation as a forest country, which cheapened our green merchandise in the eyes of the foreign consumer and created a harmful millionaire psychology among the indigenous population. There was to come a day when Peter would punish the ravishers of forest reserves by having their nostrils torn and condemning the offenders to chain-gangs. Still, Russia had so many forests that clearance was awarded with exemption from taxation for a period of fifteen years, and slightly towards the north, for all of forty years. The forest rose in such an impenetrable wall and was so fabulously stocked that the *bylinas* of ancient Russian epic made the breaking of forest roads a task for only national heroes. In the tenth and twelfth centuries all the vast lands of Kiev were covered with woods, and some rivers, now denuded, were clad in murmurous emerald silks all the way down to the sea; even now an untold amount of black oak lies idle and unused in the Dnieper bed near Kherson. If that's the case, then why sing about it! You could roam about for a thousand days in any direction, and everywhere the forest would trail at your heels like a faithful shaggy dog. It is here that we should seek the roots of our neglectful treatment of the forest. We simply took no notice of it, because it was our own, a permanent homely fixture, always handy, like air and water, like the bag strapped to one's back, where one could grope about even with a sleepy hand and be sure to find whatever one needed for body and soul. We accepted its services and bounties without ever giving a thought to its needs and troubles. The Russian ascetic, who retired into the trackless pine forest,

was called a *pustynnik*—dweller in a waste. The dense-wooded country of my childhood was called *pustosh*—wasteland. That is why the forest has not received its full due either in the national legends or songs.

“*Russkaya Pravda*,¹ the Novgorod Acts of the fourteenth century, as well as the Code of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich only mention the forest in connection with the necessity of protecting private bee-keeping. Ivan III was to forbid the felling of trees in the vicinity of the St. Trinity Monastery, but this, too, did not signify any attempt to regulate felling or establish property rights on timberland, that is, an attempt to find a place for it in civil legislation; it was merely a desire to protect the ‘praying brethren’ from mundane molestation. Russia was still ‘rivery, fishy and woody’. Under the same Ivan elk and aurochs roamed the woods of Uglich together with the bear and the chamois. But Moscow laid about her ever more vigorously with the axe until Alexei forbade felling within a radius of thirty versts round the capital city—again merely to preserve the royal hunting grounds. The unfelled forests all round murmured and swayed as of old—the forests of Kolomna and Murom, of Suzdal and Bryansk, the inaccessible forests of Kurma and Vladimir—a bottomless well of sylvan wealth, which nothing, it seemed, could drain in a thousand years.

“Everyone was now helping himself, and there was still enough to go round. At the beginning of the seventeenth century high-standing timber and crude distillation products from the Northern Dvina were shipped to the London market for the first time. There was still plenty of forest wealth in Russia, but it was being ladled out fast with a ladle that kept growing in size. With the danger of nomad invasions from the South removed, even the sacred abatis woods were put to the axe for government needs. Meanwhile the steppe was on its triumphant march northwards, and suddenly the alarmed voice of Pososhkov, the first conservationist concerned as yet with only the Orenburg and other forests across the Volga, rang through the land. It was the voice of the national conscience of the age, and it touched all aspects of civic life. As a matter of fact, Pososhkov’s advice about planting small woods around the denuded Russian villages between whiles

¹ *Russkaya Pravda*—a code of feudal laws and regulations in eleventh-twelfth-century Russia based on the common law.—*Tr.*

has lost none of its significance to this day. But even without the intervention of this patriot, the exigencies of defence would have compelled the country in any case to adopt drastic measures of forest conservation.

“When the building of the fleet at Azov began to make serious inroads into the ancient oak forests along the river Voronezh and the marginal lands the oak came under the personal protection of Peter, who declared it the inviolable fund of the admiralty. Following the oak, the ash-tree and the maple, the elm and the larch, and later also the high-standing pine, were proclaimed protected species. The wanton use of oak for axles and runners, wheels and rims, was punishable with penal servitude, be the offender a lord or his steward, while fellings were fined at the rate of ten rubles, two out of every three rubles going to the forester—an attempt to paralyse the almighty bribe. Previously logging was done with the aid of the axe and wedges, so that the proverbial splinters¹ flew about all the way from Archangel to Astrakhan; now timber users, for the sake of economy, were obliged to do at least a tenth of their lumbering with the saw; apparently they had not learnt tooth setting, because half a century later the muzhik’s axe was still going strong. In the Petrine period unlicensed felling was first superseded in this country by an appearance of regulated felling; although it was still a long way off to any real scientific understanding of the protective role of the forest on water-flow and climate, tree-felling within thirty-two versts of a river, and the building of camp-fires closer than within two sagues of a tree were severely punished already at that time. In the mining areas orders were given to take care of knotty birch that went for gun-stocks, and the use of building timber for fuel was forbidden; the extravagant old-time burials in log coffins hollowed out of oak were paid for at quadrupled rates, and damage to trees growing in the towns was punishable with penal servitude and whipping. Nevertheless, the admirals’ reports about unlicensed fellings, as a result of which the woods were becoming understocked, grew more frequent, and we see protective banks, three sagues high, thrown up along the margin of the crown forests on the Neva and the Gulf of Finland, with gallows on them five versts apart.

¹ From the Russian proverb “When a forest is felled splinters fly” (cf. “You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs”).—*Tr.*

“At first glance forest policy remained unchanged even after the stick had dropped from Peter’s dead hand: for instance, his daughter repeated her father’s waldmeister instructions concerning the planting and cultivation of high forests from the vicinity of which the local inhabitants were to be removed (1754). Both Catherines deplored the irreparable losses caused by the firing of the woods around the capital to fertilise the land; they forbade free felling, and offered maternal advice to the effect that the forest should be protected from grazing cattle and thieves of the night, that tar should be distilled from stumps and roots, and that only blown trees and breakage should be used for firewood. One can imagine how the dependent peasants must have laughed through their tears! The Second, solicitous of Russia’s welfare—for were not Diderot and Voltaire in Europe watching the queen, mistress of fifteen million serf barbarians!—even commanded Potemkin to ‘strew’ acorns over the ground around Odessa, so that grandchildren should not have to bring oak down from the north to repair the ships of the Russian fleet. But in spite of all the floggings administered for kindling camp-fires, of all the hangings done for poaching and trespassing, the oak and high-standing pine were wiped clean off the descriptive landskarten from the upper Volga to Nizhni-Novgorod. By restricting the peasants’ firebote and granting chartered liberties to the nobility for the purpose of upholding her dubious right as a foreigner to the Russian throne, the Empress graciously placed the Russian forests in the keeping of the persons upon whose lands they were standing, and freed them of all obligations connected with their protection and care (1782). From now on the all-powerful Admiralty itself did not dare to take any timber without the consent of and payment to its owner.

“The heart of woman is soft; although the ladies who sat upon the Russian throne favoured the forest because of its excellent amenities, they showed a far more tender affection for the first estate and its individual and younger members. The forest became a casket of souvenirs for awarding favourites, and, naturally, the properties thus bestowed happened to be in the most populous regions of the country, for the royal gift was worthless without serf peasants to go with it. Anna presented Biron with the Baltic forests, among other Kurland latifundia, for his unspecified ‘special qualities

and praiseworthy deeds', as stated in the imperial ukase, while Elisabeth gave her Shuvalov monopoly rights on timber exports from the north of Russia. Thus the forest areas were gradually split up, and the number of forest owners was augmented, all obsessed with a mania for showing off their nobility at home and especially abroad. The honest Russian pine was shipped out there in exchange for petit-maitre rags, botanical 'curios', stout, tobacco and other frivolous items listed by Chelishchev. The forests of Russia were still standing, but they were noticeably fewer than before; thus, when Elisabeth travelled to Kiev, the idea of building palaces at the stations had to be abandoned owing to the shortage of timber in the Ukraine, and taverns were erected instead (1743).

"Now let us follow the thread of that little whim of the lady mentioned above and see where it leads us to. His Lordship Shuvalov sold his monopoly to the foreign shipbuilder Gomm, and that worthy gentleman attacked the virgin forests around Lake Onega with might and main. The said Pyotr Chelishchev, an honest major in the service of Catherine and Radishchev's friend, who was suspected of co-authorship with him in the writing of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, describes with pain and much gnashing of teeth the fifteen-year activities of Gomm, that villainous vagabond, as he calls him; himself a contemporary and living witness, Chelishchev saw the trail of destruction that he left behind him. Owing to Gomm's alleged sudden ruin immense stacks of high-grade timber a thousand feet wide and eighteen feet high, stretching without gaps for nearly a mile along the shores of Lake Onega, timber cut by the Russian axe with money borrowed from the Russian public purse, were left to rot and go waste. It took this timber twenty years to rot away. Curiously, already at that time, our patriot saw behind Gomm's actions a deliberate design on the part of the latter's government to work mischief to our country through deforestation. Chelishchev mentions another man—a merchant by standing and a despoiler by trade. So let us give them their due, all those enlightened foreign seafarers, who gave us object lessons in western capitalism. By deception and bribery they acquired the privilege of cutting down our finest pines ten inches in diameter at the top-end; it wasn't until later, when the quality of the standing crop sharply declined owing

to the depletion of the accessible timberlands, that this standard was reduced to eight inches. Only the butt log, marked twice with the importer's brand—at the stump end, and three axe-handle lengths higher up—was exportable; the rest was left to rot where it was, and contaminate the healthy forest, which sickened as a result of the wasteful practice of 'picking the plums'. This system of selective felling, by the way, was practised right up to 1930, until the concession was obliged to betake itself off, leaving no memory of itself in the way of roads, workers' townships, or a good name. Every loss is a fourfold one unless you draw a proper lesson from it....

"We now come to the saddest page of our brief tale of Russia's deforestation. It begins with the fall of serfdom, and for decades afterwards the whole of Russia was swept, as it were, by a cold forest fire. By the eighties it had become an assault upon the forests on a hitherto unprecedented scale; only Russia's bad roads and the tremendous amount of labour required for felling century-old trees by the rough and ready methods of our grandfathers curbed that wanton slaughter of our Green Friend. It was fortunate for Russia that our up-and-coming young commerce did not possess the modern electric saw, which would have played havoc with our great pine forests of the north and scalped the land all the way to the Pechora and Murmansk, thus hastening the southward march of the tundra. Two potent factors were responsible for the slaughter of the forests in the nineteenth century: the downfall of Russian feudalism, followed by the impoverishment of the nobility, who were unable to run their estates efficiently with voluntary hired labour, and the rapid development of our industry. If wood had blazed before in the furnaces of the sugar refineries, breweries, and distilleries, now its principal consumer was the metal industry. In the Urals it was already starved for fuel and was lagging appreciably behind the South, where immense deposits of cheap underground coal had been most opportunely discovered. The building of railways gave a new impetus to forest devastation. Incidentally, all over the world the introduction of the locomotive led to overfelling, that is, consumption of timber at a rate exceeding the annual increment. It was a compulsory loan out of the rations of the still unborn generations, the silence of the creditor in such cases usually

being taken for unqualified consent. Meanwhile the birth of the cellulose industry was drawing near: like the coal mines, it would attack the fine-grain Vologda spruce, which could even be used for musical instruments. The demand rose, the rate of felling increased, prices doubled. Saw-mills sang their clattering song even in the steppe ... and so, towards the end of the last century, wood consumption reached the figure of two hundred and seventy million cubic metres. Members of all the wealthy classes took part in that haphazard pillage known as capitalist progress. Russia resounded with the crash of falling forest giants, which drowned the noise of the shooting in the Crimean campaign, which had just ended.

“Progress arm in arm with profit invaded the coniferous thickets, leaving behind a trail of battle-scarred chaos, a melancholy aftermath, and a disproportionately small number of petty industrial enterprises. Such a mad lust for wealth had previously been seen only during the gold rushes. At the head of that witch-struck whirligig, illumined by that novelty of engineering, the magic electric lamps, and generously primed with champagne to make it go round more merrily, strutted the well-favoured grinning ‘whistler-robbers’ with stars and medals on their chests, followed by others with bowlers at a rakish angle and a hungry insolent gleam in their eyes. The rich crop of corpses, if only those of forestial origin, and the warm odour of decay lured the night birds and the midges from the dens of Europe, all kinds of fairies in clouds of lace and respectable-looking bank speculators with travelling-bags. And once more the bearded Russian forest, by courtesy of the government, bows down to the ground to foreign scalawags. Everyone now is felling, picking out the choicest pieces—members of the newborn kulak class, ready to hack down the trees in the cemetery at the head of their own mothers’ graves; the monastic brethren on the cloistral estates, who leave to the Lord the task of forest regeneration; the conscript fathers, like those of Kherson town, who razed their famous acacias when they were having the telephone laid; a motley mob of travelling agents from the western provinces, never before seen in the Russian forest, who buy up from the nobles at a low price their property rights, and from the peasants their allotments through the medium of the volost elders who, taking a leaf out of their master’s book, also started felling, sometimes not because there was any need to

do so or because they wanted to lay in a stock for a prospective buyer, but simply because of an intense itching of the hands. And so, little by little, that sturdy branch on which we had been sitting since the days of Gostomysl,¹ begins to wear thin. More and more often, as in an oppressive dream, the thought of the profligate exploitation of the Russian forest preys on the minds of Russian patriots. We find Aksakov now weeping over Vasilchikov's forest article, and although everyone realises that improvidence will have its inevitable reward, the society of the day acts according to the tested hypocritical rule: just one more sin, another go, and then repentance! The magnitude of the forest destruction can be judged from the figures of rail and water-way traffic quoted by Lenin in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.

"Naturally, when there is too much of anything it inevitably trickles through the fingers, but already in those days it was trickling through them faster than sand. And then, all of a sudden, the millers, as one man, noticed a drop in the low water-mark, and old-timers noted in their diaries that the gopher was now hopping about where the bear used to prowl. From Nizhni-Novgorod you could now see straight through to Kostroma, and from Voronezh to Saratov; sand-storms were knocking at the gates of Ryazan like a mob of yellow ghosts from the past, while the thistle, the wormwood, and all kinds of prickly demongrowth, in addition to what the Mongolian cavalry had brought hither on its hooves and in its manes, crept forth from beyond the Caspian bent on conquest. Over three and a half million hectares of land have been blanketed by shifting sand in the Astrakhan region during the last century. The Don and the Dnieper were becoming steppe rivers, and hitherto gentle brooks were bursting dams in the spring, while at the height of the summer they became timidly torpid and buried themselves in the sand like the Asiatic lizard at the sight of a man. The shallows were spreading along stream courses; their valleys were widening and their strength ebbing, and finally their beds began to show through. More and more often passengers were asked to take a stroll ashore while their old tub of a boat crawled across the shoals on her belly. The daughters of the Volga were no longer able to feed their mother, and only the

¹ Gostomysl—a burgomaster of ancient Novgorod.—*Tr.*

eldest of them from the land of unfelled trees, the Kama, still maintained her pristine glory. Unless man did something to protect the rivers, they would interfere themselves by checking his one-sided destructive activities; they would not let his steamers go upstream, they would parch his ploughlands, and spoil the floating season—and three-quarters of our felled timber is transported by water. Things like that have happened in our day, too, the water level dropping so sharply as a result of riverside felling that rafts of the same season got stranded in the shallows on the upper reaches of the Kama, the Vychegda, the Northern Dvina and the Belaya; the bed of the Kama, by the way, is paved with a six-metre layer of deadheads—sunken logs.

“And so the balance of Nature is seriously disturbed, with disastrous results. Springs dry up, lakes become peaty, slack waters become covered with arrowheads and cat-tails. The earth languishes without its grassy cover; one day people were to learn by bitter experience what it costs to replace the sod that has been torn from it and to make the acorn strike root in the salt marsh. When the forest goes it goes for good. There is nothing now to prevent the soil from being washed away by run-off. Gullies and ravines form in growing numbers, working as gigantic draining ditches, black-earth dredgers. In the South, where we have eighty thousand collective farms, the bulk of the melting snows run off rapidly and uselessly before the frozen soil can catch the moisture, and they sweep away the fertile surface soil. In the summer months, when the crops are ripening, the rivers suck away what remains of the scant ground waters. And so we are letting a monster into our Soviet house, deliverance from whom will require a far greater effort than the one we expended in banishing the forest.

“The disturbed conditions of water-flow have long been telling on the well-being of the nation. Crop failures hit the country hard every decade—1891-1901-1911. Nor is peasant life all honey in between. Rinderpest kills off the cattle, and fodder is scarce—not even the bitter mouldy straw from the roofs, which always served our farmers as a reserve for a rainy day, is any help. Dismal God-invoking processions with crosses and icons move across the scorched fields to the sound of prayers and the steady rasp of the nearby saw. Migrants trudge endlessly in search of places untouched by

native capitalism—unmowed meadows, unmuddied waters, and uncut woodlands—for is our country not vast and boundless! Mothers knead chaff mixed with nettles and gout-weed for their children, the while they gaze anxiously at the wan-blue glassy sky. Wonder of wonders!—axes are knocking along the Sura and the Irgiz, but echo answers back with children's cries from across the Volga. And so we have Dokuchayev comparing Russian farming with a gamble, and in 1893 the agronomist Izmailsky predicts the speedy transformation of the steppes into desert, and this is followed in the press by a still more ominous prediction: 'Years shall pass, and the *aryks*¹ will come to Ryazan. It is only a lucky traveller who will find a well with brackish water at Kharkov.' This is the calamity from which socialism is called upon to save our peasantry.

"In the ancient struggle between forest and steppe man has been taking an active part on the side of the latter. It would be presumptuous to ascribe climatic damage only to human agency, but still more dangerous would it be to underestimate this damage under the conditions of modern technology. Do not let your anxieties be allayed by the not very comforting thought that this tiresome dispute about the forests has been raging since the days of Reaumur and Buffon; Democritus accounted for the presence of salt by the evaporation of the seas, and Kant deplored the water that our planet was losing, and our historian Solovyov warned us that the deserts were on the march ... but look, mankind still exists, and even zealously uses firearms! All the worse for mankind. People have always had to pay cruelly for ignoring the so-called 'banal' truths.

"It would be wrong to think that Russia was the only country in which the nineteenth century was marked with the ruthless slaughter of the forests. Living witnesses of the age, Marx and Engels, noted the same process throughout the world, and spoke hopefully about the time when man would learn to perceive the ultimate consequences of his activity, some of which, we would add, his descendants would have to pay dearly for in the shape of complex hydraulic engineering structures. The forest is always the forest, whether in Siberia or in France; the forest owner is true to type, whether on

¹ Irrigation ditches of the arid East.—*Tr.*

Kamchatka or in the Rhineland. Everywhere capitalism made its first leap at the expense of the forest, chiefly the more workable tree species of the moderate climate. Thoughts of the morrow are alien to the beast; a capitalist's reason is in his claws and fangs. He moves along, devouring everything in his path, to perish like a dog from hunger and cold in some Cro-Magnon hole together with those who had had the misfortune to trust him; that's what fascism is—the fury of the beast, whose food, grown wiser, keeps giving him the slip. American capitalism started its harvest long before ours, when, still in its infancy, it attacked the timber forests of the Great Lakes and the Southern States, and in the present century—the Pacific Coast. It wiped out the eastern white pine, it burnt potash out of the rare hemlock, and made fencing out of the black walnut, and hacked the spruce away like so much waste wood until its use for cellulose was discovered. Starting at the top, they chopped their way down to the South. In the last three decades their forest area has shrunk to nearly half its size; Michigan and Minnesota have been deforested, and in the state of New York vigorous felling was resorted to as a remedy against unemployment. Capital lives on a quick return, and this particularly affected long-rotation tree crops. Half of all the giant sequoias have already been destroyed, and this is a species that reaches full maturity at the age of four thousand years; posterity will only see it behind the railings of botanical gardens. *Large-scale* reafforestation is no mean task even for a socialist society, which is able to concentrate tremendous power at bottleneck sections of its economy; all the more naive does the talk about this sound in the United States, where ninety per cent of the forest in the exploitable zone belong to private owners. Barely a seventh part of the shelter belt in the Great Lakes area has been planted, and even that is dying out. The clearing of thousands of acres of primeval forest cannot be compensated by the planting of saplings on the same area; to bring these two elements into line a century of *time* is needed, in the course of which *proper* forest management should be conducted. Even then, you never know what will come of it. Agriculture depends entirely upon the condition of the forests, and it was Marx again who spoke about the capitalist art of robbing the soil and destroying the sources of its fertility. In this manner about three hundred million acres of land have

been ruined in America, and its yield capacity in some places reduced to a tenth. All the figures quoted fluctuate with an upward tendency—let them serve as coordinates of the day on which we have met. In foreign literature you will find colourful descriptions of how the land behaves when it is first given over to the mercy of the owner, and then to the unbridled elements. Black storms sweep across fields that are trampled to ashes, and the sun looks down from the dust-shrouded sky like a trachomatous eye. Together with the other causes of capitalist decline, erosion of the soil calls forth erosion of the spirit, egoism and fear, the philosophy of overpopulation, sterility of thought, and, finally, loss of faith in man's mission.

“The lack of accurate statistical information makes it difficult for us to ponder the problem of the world's forests. But when, in England itself, there is no timber wood left, and when, in France, the forest area has shrunk to a quarter during the last century, it is not difficult to imagine what went on in the colonies, where the enlightened European always modelled his behaviour after Cortez and Pizarro. The work of the nomads, who checked the spread of the forests with the hoofs of their herds, was effectively continued by capitalist civilisation. Thus, the famous Lebanese forests disappeared, and the frontier posts of Hadrian stand like tombstones amid the desolate hills. The Asiatic South-East was denuded, and India and China, possessing half the world's population, account for barely a thirtieth of the world's forest wealth. On the Upper Ganges the green cover has survived only on a narrow margin along the Himalayas, and the sacred river runs amuck in the spring like the Mississippi, exacting payment from people for their too-long non-resistance to evil. The rare teak, which used to occur at the rate of not more than half a dozen to the hectare, has been completely wiped out south of Godavari; the satinwood and ebony forests of the Coromandel Coast have reverted to scrub. The Japanese plunderer, like the Mitsubishi concern, has deforested Manchuria, and one can imagine the havoc he is now playing with the century-old camphor stands on Taiwan, the use of which species for industrial distillation is only permissible when they attain the age of two hundred years. The magnitude of the disaster compels us to look back at the figures showing the place which wood holds in the

life of man and the nature of its utilisation in the world.

“The field and the forest are the most powerful of machines, which convert the sun’s energy and the soil’s fertility into the essential products of our existence. Timber is second only to coal and food among the world’s raw material resources. Two-thirds of the timber felled on this planet is burnt immediately as fuel, and considerably more than half of what is left goes to waste because of the criminally low level of processing. Speaking of the efficiency factor in the gratification of vital needs among various living creatures, one cannot help admitting sometimes that the tiger eats more economically than the man. The forests of the temperate zone bear the brunt of the blow. Peru, half of whose territory is covered with jungles, and Venezuela with her heavily stocked timber forests on the Orinoco, are importing timber from Canada to this day. Thus world economy is steadily drawing nations closer together in a single family where all answer for each other. Deforestation of the Scandinavian countries would bring the virgin forests of Malaya into circulation, forest fires on the Hudson would bring into being the timber industry of Latin America. Concern for the future and the endangered sources of life make it imperative for the peoples to hold a powwow without self-interested go-betweens, who are accustomed to making profit out of human woes. Up till now attempts at international co-operation have taken the form of a collective wagging of wise heads at the disappearing forests. Advocates of the bourgeoisie regard deforestation as an unavoidable stage on the thorny path towards perfection; similarly, their economists hold the poverty of the overwhelmed majority to be a natural feature of modern civilisation. Nevertheless, there will be forests enough for posterity if we apply to them the law of return and fair play. However, we shall hardly be able to cope with such a task until a self-conscious society, that explosive cloud of hot gas, will fling itself upon the blades of the common turbine of communist progress.

“The difference between the forest exploitation of yesterday, which served to enrich the few, and that of today, which benefits future generations, is perfectly clear. All sacrifices are sacred in the fight for the Soviet cause, and no forester’s heart will sink at the sight of Byelorussia’s Polesye coming down ridge upon ridge to form a barrier in the path of the

nazi tanks. This is not the first time that the Russian forest stands with us shoulder to shoulder in work and warfare; during the years of economic chaos and intervention it did its full share of the work for the workers' and peasants' republic. With coal and oil cut off by the fronts, *it* hauled army and food trains across the land, delivering the heroic austerity ration to the cities. *It* drove the freezing machine-tools of industry, kept the workers' dwellings warm. Its depletion was such that Lenin, at the Ninth Congress of Soviets, raised his voice for timber to be excluded from the national fuel budget and for all foresters to be returned from the army and other places to their main jobs. The law of that year speaks clearly about the necessity of regulated cutting by increment and schedule, that is, about rigid scientific forestry practices. But after a brief respite came the First Five-Year Plan with Magnitogorsk and Karaganda, the Turksib and the Dnieper Power Station; the tractor plants of four cities, the iron and steel industry, and heavy engineering demanded an immediate supply of pile timber and concrete casing, stout pole-wood and boards for the housing of builders. All the firstlings of our industry lay in wooden swaddling clothes, and it would have gone ill with us now, in face of the onset of fascism, had not our people, in their time, taken the short cut across the summits of the century. We launched humanity's cause amid gnashing of teeth on the part of our clever enemies and malicious taunts on the part of the stupid; it is ever the way of the moth to have a good time while the ant is working. We were poor, but we bought foreign experience and machines for honest cash, and they took it, those most Christian gentlemen of the West—the butter and bread of our children, the treasures of our museums, the watershed protection forest, using the heroism of the Soviet nation to redeem their shaken fortunes. In the hurry we felled everything, regardless of age, or species, drawing into the torrent the forests of the North and the East, with the former depleted areas still bearing the brunt of the strain. Meanwhile the main forest, the famous third of the world's timberlands, still stood untouched, rotting and going to waste. Even now Nature there is stronger than man, and life is confined to the margins, for birds do not sing in coniferous forests. Honeycombed by beetles, singed by lightning, the dead stand there in their moss-woven grave-clothes, leaning upon the shoulders of the

living, and the traveller has to fight his way through the brushwood and clouds of mosquitoes just as he did in the bad old days. Now compare that with the denuded landscape of central Russia!

“There can be no indifference in matters that concern the forest, for our people are to live for ever upon this sacred land. Their demand for timber, paper, and the products of complex forest chemistry will continue to grow until the improved technology of communism will have taught us to make everything out of everything. Every house in town requires two cubic metres of wood to a square metre of floor space. Four-hundred cubic metres of wood for auxiliary structures, telegraph communication and sleepers are required for every kilometre of railway—by rights it ought to be called woodway. Every day dozens of long trainloads of pit props are swallowed up by the Donets coal-fields alone. When you leave this school with the diplomas of foresters, timber consumption will probably have doubled. However impoverished our woodlands may be, the country will demand of you increasing supplies, and the axe will become still sharper, the way to the tree still shorter, and its conversion into a consumable product considerably easier than now. The axe, the crowbar, and the peasant sledges are being superseded in the forest by travelling electric stations and a new kind of saw, acting like an ordinary mower, by traction-engine and bulldozers, multi-framed sawmills, rafting machines and other unreasoning steel. All this, like the scalpel in the hand of the surgeon, infinitely enhances man’s responsibility towards the green, living, helpless creature, which is not hidden in an earth shelter under a mile-thick roof, like dead oil or coal, and does not have even a thorn for self-protection. Thus arises the necessity of a nation-wide forest consciousness to deal with the problem of the forest’s right of citizenship in the country’s economy and to revise the whole pattern of our treatment of it. And perhaps—who knows?—it will then come to occupy a place of honour among the non-ferrous metals.

“Naturally, the revision of our attitude to the forest is not going to be an easy job, but was it not stern necessity which made man invent the lever and the wheel, new forms of driving power and machines, the socialist revolution and other beneficent ways of bettering life, without which the human

race would have run wild and degenerated. True, all the other economies in the world are to blame for this wanton waste of the forests, but then ours is a socialist economy!

“It’s time we took a look round now to see how much of that ‘magic ruble’ we have left, and examine what remains of it through the magnifying glass of scientific forest management, which, by the way, has not been taught with us for fifteen years. Of course, even today it is still difficult to imagine our country without the blue margin on its horizon, and I even anticipate protests from laymen and city dwellers who rent cottages in the country in the summer that I am painting the picture of the Russian forest with an *overanxious* brush. ‘Why, only the other day,’ I am sure to be told, ‘Mrs. so-and-so went mushrooming in the aspen grove and came back with a full basket!’ In the past, too, malicious attempts were made to misinterpret our appeal for thrifty and careful treatment of the forest as a demand to ban all felling. I am ready to concede that there is a prime in the life of every man, when he stores up life’s impressions with hungry zest, but afterwards, no matter how young he may remain till the end of his days, he will merely be diluting his stock of accumulated experience with the observations of novelty. My personal experience was formed in the years of intensive and profligate exploitation of the forests. However, it was not to alarm you with the magnitude of the job facing you that I was obliged to touch on certain sad obvious facts, but simply out of desire to share with you an impatient creative concern, without which we, foresters, become mere armchair sitters and recorders of forestial woes.

“Today already full-fledged masters of your country, in a few years’ time you will stand at its helm. Some of you will become scientists and planners, others captains of industry, law-makers and deputies to Soviets. In your swift stride forward, just figure out from the heights of grand strategy whether it is right to take only the timber that is *handy*, whether we should, for instance, work the town outskirts for firewood, cut the ribbon forests of Altai or the massifs of the Upper Ob which screen the Kulundinskaya Steppe—the granary of Siberia—from the dry Mongolian winds, as well as the woods around the socialist works and building sites. Just think, would it not be more correct, in place of this hurried semi-nomad method of lumbering, to set up a settled and

highly progressive type of lumbering enterprise with a permanent force of workers, that is, to bring the processing closer to the raw material, and save the good-weight crumbs from falling off our extravagant table. Would it not be more profitable to make the cutting area the primary production unit of a diversified lumbering enterprise, which is to provide itself with a stable and continuous crop, extracting all that can be extracted from the timber on the spot without giving the railways extra work to do in carrying eighty per cent of sawdust, chips and moisture? This would make our timber exploitation a progressive branch of agriculture, it would enhance the marketable value of the felled tree, make for greater prosperity of the Russian northern region, which does not grow even an apple of its own, and would provide additional means for immediate reforestation within the bounds of every timber enterprise. Just check up—is it necessary to skid the timber without first lopping the branchwood and thus ripping away the soil cover or to continue tapping for oleoresin in the exhausted regions of the Ukraine and Byelorussia instead of the Olonets forests, as directed by Soviet law, or to leave fuel wood in the cutting area, dooming it to windfall and turning the area into a refuse dump. Is it not time we started taking care of the doomed groves by making it *compulsory* for all timber designed for outdoor structures to be properly impregnated and treated, by reducing the amount of *chip waste* and *firewood*, and by re-working paper utility refuse. Big money and grave happenings are usually made up of dropped kopeks and overlooked trifles.

“The time has come to repay our debt to this taciturn comrade. At the festival of forest revival let industry greet him with machines no less powerful than those it had used to draw its strength from him from the moment it was born. Only by glancing at the truthful forest map of the country will you realise the magnitude of that debt and the urgency of its repayment. Although, according to Timiryazev, the forester and the farmer have the same aims, both of them trying to obtain the greatest possible yield from the plant, the farmer gathers in his harvest yearly, whereas the forester is almost a stranger to the creative satisfaction which should reward every long effort. Your crop will take a long time to ripen, my young friends, and few of you will live to see the harvest. But

one day, bareheaded and with deep emotion, you will pass through the murmurous, almost palatial halls of the Kamen-naya Steppe with its malachite walls of trees and roof of dazzling clouds born of them. That inspired craftsman of the woods, Vasily Dokuchayev, and his hardworking apprentices, saw them only in imagination. To the builder of human happiness a dream is as effective an instrument as knowledge or ideas, and a silviculturist without dreams is just nothing. Of course, there are no second-rate professions in our country, but it seems to me that in our job of the forester the socialist succession of the generations is more clearly expressed than in any other. And who knows, when you come grey of head to stand beneath the closed crowns of your nurselings, whether you will not feel ten times more proud than the creators of some hasty books, half-finished buildings, or machines that age so quickly.

“In no other country is a man given a chance to be not a shameless exploiter of Nature, nor a helpless little leaf in its torrent, but a great directing force of the universe. To be that he must spy out the mysterious interplay of forces that unite all phenomena into a living organic whole in order to lighten and speed up the work of Nature in her striving towards perfection, which she is trying to achieve blindly, wastefully, by a myriad of trials and cruel errors. In this lies the purpose and meaning of human reason; socialism is the most honest and economical form of its activity. We are moving along our path with unprecedented strides, but evil, potent though doomed, will continue to place obstacles in our path. Today it has loosed on us another of its hounds, who, in his bestial ignorance, believes that he is acting on his own volition. But we have all the prior experience of history to tell us that the bright thousand-named hero of folk legend always conquered the monster who lay guarding the source of human happiness.

“Glory to our people and our army! Welcome, young foresters!”

The lecturer concluded with a gesture that invited his listeners, as it were, to pass under the imaginary green arch behind him, then he reached for the water bottle ... and suddenly everything was drowned in a crash of applause.



(1920, Moscow)

Yuri Nagibin published his first short story in 1940. He was then a student at the scriptwriting faculty of the Institute of Cinematography. In 1942, he left for the front as a volunteer. After being wounded, he spent the remaining years of the war as army correspondent for the newspaper TRUD.

Nagibin's name is associated with the development of the Soviet short story of the 1950s and 1960s. His range of subjects is exceptionally wide: stories about the last war, highly dramatic tales about present-day life; stories about children which have already become anthology pieces; stories about hunting and nature, about people of the same cast of mind living in different parts of the world. Nagibin's writings have already been drawn on for more than 20 collections, and are published in large editions.

In the last ten years, Nagibin has also written film scripts and articles on literature and the cinema (REFLECTIONS ON THE SHORT STORY).

The Rendezvous

ZHENYA RUMYANTSEVA

The last lesson of the last school day in our lives was over. We still had days of difficult exams ahead of us, but we would never have another lesson again. We would have lectures, seminars, colloquiums—all such grown-up words! There would be lecture halls and laboratories, but no schoolrooms, no desks. Our ten school years came to an end with the familiar, somewhat husky sound of the bell that started downstairs, in the depth of the staff room, and, swelling, rose to the sixth floor, where our tenth forms were, reaching us just a bit later.

And all of us—excited, moved, jubilant, vaguely regretful, confused and embarrassed by our momentary transformation from schoolboys and girls into grown-up men and women who could even marry if they wished—wandered about the schoolrooms and corridors, as though afraid to leave the safety of the school walls and enter a world that had become infinite. And we also had the feeling that we had not yet said everything, not yet done everything, not yet drawn everything from our ten years' school life, as if this moment had taken us unawares.

The azure skies poured their blue into the open windows, pigeons were cooing on the window sills in voices that were coarse from passion, there was a smell of trees in flower and of water-sprinkled asphalt.

Zhenya Rumyantseva looked into the room.

"Seryozha, can I speak to you a minute?"

I came out into the corridor. On this unusual day Zhenya, too, seemed not quite her usual self. She was dressed as ridiculously as she always was—in a skirt she had grown out of a year ago, a cardigan that was too narrow to button up, worn over a white silk blouse that had been laundered and blued too often, and her shoes were square-toed, like a child's. One might think that she was dressed in the castoffs of a younger sister. Her enormous mop of ash-blond hair was somehow held together with pins, clasps and combs to frame her small face, but it stubbornly fell over her forehead and cheeks, one strand kept slipping down over her small nose and she irritably brushed it away. What made her look not her

usual self was the blush that spread in an even pink over her face, and the eager, intimate light in her big grey eyes that were grave and earnest one moment, and absently unseeing the next.

"Look, Seryozha, let's make a date ten years from now."

"What for?" I asked her seriously, because Zhenya was anything but a flippant sort.

"I want to know what you'll be like then," she said, brushing back the tiresome strand of hair. "You've meant so much to me all these years, you know."

I thought such words and such feelings were unknown to Zhenya Rumyantseva. She spent her entire life either doing Komsomol work—she was our Komsomol organiser—or dreaming about the stellar worlds. I never heard her speak of anything else except stars, planets, orbits, solar prominences and space flights. Most of us had not decided yet what we wanted to be in life, but Zhenya had known from the time she was in the sixth form that she was going to be an astronomer.

We were never very close friends, and our association was rather businesslike, through Komsomol activities mostly. Some years earlier I almost got myself expelled from the Young Pioneers for something, but all my friends stood up for me and I kept my Red Tie. Zhenya alone, a newcomer to our school, voted to the last for my expulsion. This, naturally, affected my entire attitude towards her. Later I understood that she was so relentless because the demands she placed on people and on herself were uncommonly high and not because she was mean or anything. Herself a person with a crystal-clear conscience, with a heart that was staunch and loyal, she wanted everyone around her to be the same. I was not a "*chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*", and now her sudden admission amazed and disconcerted me. I ran over the past in my mind but I found nothing there, except perhaps that afternoon in Clear Ponds....

A group of us agreed to go for a boat ride on Khimki storage lake one Sunday afternoon. We were all to meet outside the big summer-house in Clear Ponds. But a drizzle began in mid-morning and no one turned up except Pavlik Arshansky, Nina Barysheva, Zhenya Rumyantseva and myself. Nina came because she'd be bored staying at home, I came because of Nina, Pavlik came because of me, and Zhenya came for no reason any of us knew.

She never came to our small parties, never went to the movies, the recreation park or the “Hermitage” with us. No one thought her a prude for it, we knew she simply had no time: she attended the astronomy circle at Moscow University and also did something at the Planetarium. We respected Zhenya’s strength of purpose, and didn’t bother her.

And so we four met in the summer-house—a wooden umbrella-like roof resting on wooden pillars. The rain either came in a noisy, spanking downpour, or was thinned out to mere threads, almost invisible and inaudible, but still it did not stop falling for a minute. The sky was a pall of grey, with not a rift in the clouds. Going to Khimki was out of the question. But Zhenya tried to talk us into going just the same. This was the first time that she had allowed herself to depart from her strict schedule, and now this! It was really tough luck! She had brought some sandwiches along, wrapped in paper and tied with string, an end of which was looped round a button on her short plush jacket. There was something touching about this small package of food. Evidently, it had never occurred to her that we might eat at a canteen, a café or even a restaurant, which is what we usually did on our outings. This small package moved me to pity, and I said:

“Let’s go for a ride in that,” I suggested, pointing to an old flat-bottomed boat, whose bow stuck out from under the piles supporting the boathouse. “And let’s pretend we’re in Khimki.”

“Or sailing the Mediterranean,” said Pavlik.

“Or the Indian Ocean!” Zhenya took the cue in high delight. “Or sailing close to Greenland!”

“We won’t drown, will we?” Nina asked. “It’d be a pity, because someone’s taking me to a first night at the Art Theatre tonight.”

We found two small boards to do for oars since there were none, bailed out the water, and started on our sail round the world. It was hardly fun for any of us except Zhenya. While Pavlik and I paddled lazily with our boards, Zhenya mapped out our route. The Bosphorus, the Suez Canal, the Arabian Sea, the Great Sunda Islands, the Philippines, and the Pacific....

Zhenya’s belated childishness was touching and sweet, yet it was sort of pitiful too.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to where the wet pillars of the Coliseum cinema made a dreary sight through the leafage glistening with raindrops. "See the palms, the lianas, the elephants! We've drifted towards India!"

We three exchanged glances. You know how it is at seventeen: we protected our inner world, so delicate still and so vulnerable, with an armour of put-on irony and a show of cynicism, and so we simply could not understand how a person could be so simple and naive.

"We're approaching the terrible Solomon Islands!" Zhenya said in a sinister whisper.

"Cannibals! Over there!" Pavlik, the kindest of us three, played up, pointing to some young chaps who were having a smoke together on the shore.

This boring boat riding in the rain went on and on. Zhenya was the tireless commander, shouting the orders, and finding her bearings by the stars—our compass had got smashed in a storm. This was her chance to treat us to a lecture on astronomy of which all I remember is that beyond the equator the sky is sort of upside down. After that we were shipwrecked, and Zhenya shared out to us "the last of the hard tack"—that is, her sodden sandwiches. We munched them glumly, while Zhenya talked about Robinson Crusoe, whose life on the desert island appealed to her enormously.

I was drenched to the skin, I was tired, and I had a splinter in my hand, which made me more cruel still, and so I told her that "Robinson Crusoe" was a hymn to Philistinism, and no other story could beat it in that.

"There's nothing in it but a lot of piffling worries about grub, clothing and pots. Just endless lists of food and junk...."

"And for me there's nothing more exciting than those lists, as you call them!" Zhenya said, tears starting to her eyes. "The story has such sweep...the elements...the courage...."

Nina put an end to our argument.

"Hurry! I see land!" she suddenly shouted.

"Oh where, where?" Zhenya was all excitement.

"Over there, by the boathouse," Nina said prosaically. "Enough is enough, we're getting out. Boys, I'm frozen stiff, we'll just have some hot coffee!"

Zhenya looked at us in perplexity, a blush on her cheeks.

"Why not?" she said bravely. "I'm all for a spree if you are!"

We drove the boat under the piles, got out on dry land, and came face to face with my old enemy Lyalik. This juvenile delinquent had in the past few years known the inside of both a jail and a corrective labour camp. He looked much tougher and more broad-shouldered now, and affected the glowering scowl of a hard-bitten thug. Pushing me out of his way with one shoulder and Pavlik with the other, Lyalik cursed foully. He felt secure in the glory of his notorious criminal record, he knew he'd get away with it. His reputation frightened us more than the bully himself. We were overwhelmed by the sinister splendour of his fate, we felt such sorry little snobs, compared to him, such sissies. How could we stand up to this desperate character?

"How dare you use such language, you hooligan?" Zhenya cried indignantly: she did not know what Lyalik was.

He turned round, and advanced on us in silence. But Zhenya challenged him. She tugged hard at the broken vizor of his old cap, pulled it down over his nose, and pushed him in the chest with all her might. He staggered backwards, got tripped up by the low railing protecting the lawn, and tumbled into the grass.

And suddenly we saw that Lyalik was just a boy like Pavlik and me, and his villainous look was sheer bluff.

"Must you shove?" he mumbled miserably, trying to extricate his nose from the cap.

After that we went to the café, and, sitting under a wet striped umbrella, drank hot coffee and cold beer. Zhenya drank a glass of beer. The pins and clasps holding her enormously thick hair in place all fell out at once, her face became flushed, and she began calling herself a drunk and a hopeless case for all to hear. We were a bit ashamed for her, and afraid that the waitress would refuse to bring us more beer because Zhenya couldn't have looked more like a minor than she did then, sitting in that café, her hair all just anyhow and her short skirt slipping to above-knee level. She also told us that she'd like to die in the first space flight, because it was impossible to conquer outer space without some lives sacrificed, and she'd rather it was her life than that of some worthier person.

We knew that she was saying all this quite sincerely, never suspecting how superior she was to us in spirit, and it made us feel small. We weren't like her even after beer.

Zhenya never joined us in our outings after that. We often invited her to our parties, but she was always too busy to come. Maybe she really had no time, there was such a lot she wanted to do. Was it because of me that she came that one and only time, was it because of me that she stopped coming, admitting to herself with honest pride: "It's no use"?

"But Zhenya, why didn't you tell me before?" I asked her.

"What was the use? You had such a crush on Nina."

"When and where shall we meet?" I asked with a vexatious and sad feeling of loss.

"Ten years from now, on May 29, at eight in the evening in front of the Bolshoi Theatre, between the two central pillars."

"How d'you know they're the central ones?"

"I know, I've counted the pillars, there're eight. By that time I'll be a famous astronomer," she said dreamily, yet with conviction. "If I change an awful lot, you'll know me by my pictures in the papers."

"Oh, well, by that time I'll be famous too," I said and stopped short: I had not the slightest notion how I was to become famous, in what field, and I had not even decided what I wanted to be. "At any rate I'll drive up in my own car."

It was silly, but at least it seemed like a good thing to say.

"Oh, lovely!" Zhenya said, laughing. "You'll give me a ride...."

Years passed. Zhenya studied in Leningrad, and I lost touch with her. In the winter of 1941, eagerly picking up every bit of news about my friends, I learnt that Zhenya had left the institute on the very first day of war and enrolled in a flying school. In the summer of 1944, when I was lying wounded in hospital, I heard over the radio that Major Rumyantseva of the Air Force had the title of Hero of the Soviet Union conferred on her. When I returned from the war I found out that the title had been conferred on Zhenya posthumously.

Life went on, sometimes I suddenly remembered the date Zhenya had made with me, and a few days before May 29, I began to feel so restless, I felt such heartache, as if all those ten years I had been preparing only for that rendezvous.

I did not become famous, as I promised Zhenya, but I did own a shabby old Opel, bought for a song at the dump of

trophy cars. I put on a new suit I had, mounted my “trusty steed” and drove to the Bolshoi. If I had met Zhenya there I would have told her that my vacillating was over and I had found my road in life: a book of my stories had come out, and I was writing my next one. They were not the books I dreamed of writing, but I was firm in my belief that I would write them yet.

I parked my car, bought a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley from a flower girl, and walked to the pillars of the Bolshoi Theatre. There really were eight pillars. I stood there for a while, then gave the flowers to a thin grey-eyed young girl in tennis shoes, and drove home....

I wanted time to stop for a moment, I wanted to take stock of myself, I wanted to see that girl in her short skirt and tight cardigan, that heavy, unwieldy flat-bottomed boat, the rain falling on the yellowish water of the pond, to hear her excited shout: “We’ve drifted towards India!”, and recall the blindness of youth, so lightheartedly passing by what might have been my happiness.

1962

Translated by Bernard Isaacs

F. Abramov

(b. 1920, Verkola, near Arkhangelsk)

Fyodor Abramov was born in north-west Russia and it was here that he began his working life. This was the land which he defended in action near Leningrad, and to which he returned after recovering from his wounds. It is to the people of this part of the country that his writing is dedicated.

In 1948, Abramov graduated from the philological faculty of Leningrad University. He stayed on to complete his post-graduate studies, defended a thesis, and became head of the chair of Soviet literature. But in the midst of a successful academic career he never forgot the great things the people of his region had achieved during the war and in the hard years that followed.

The year 1958 saw the appearance of Abramov's novel BROTHERS AND SISTERS, which takes place during the war years, when the armed forces were straining every muscle to beat off the fascist invaders and the women, children and old men left behind in the villages gave the last ounce of their strength to bring in the grain and timber that the country needed.

In 1968, the second of Abramov's cycle of novels appeared. In

TWO WINTERS AND THREE SUMMERS we meet many of the same characters. The war was over, but their life had not become any easier because a large part of the country was in ruins, nearly 1,200 Russian towns and cities had been razed to the ground by the invaders, and the war had cost the country more than 20 million lives. It would take time to reconstruct and to grow enough food for the famine-threatened population. And yet another feat of labour and patience was performed by the people of that northern village, which Abramov describes with such affection, and which reflects the historic achievement of the whole Soviet people.

The third part of this epic work appeared in 1973 and was called **ROADS AND CROSS-ROADS**. Rural life in the early 1950s demanded radical changes. Describing the situation with the same love for his fellow villagers, the author shows that most of all he respects their sense of conscience, their honesty in work, and their broad humanity.

A paradoxical aspect of this author's writing, which is devoted mainly to the life of the countryside, is that it is of such immediate relevance during the rapidly advancing scientific and technological revolution. His searching inquiry into such human values as conscience and the sense of duty to one's people is particularly relevant today, when it is important not to lose the truly humane guidelines in social development.

Two Winters and Three Summers

(An excerpt)

The sun was only just coming up on the other side of the river when Anna reached the fields with her knapsack, a birchbark jar full of milk, and a rake. She was glad to be up betimes, to have finished with the stove and the cow before everyone else, and to be first out and on her way to work. And another reason for her joy was that she would soon be seeing her children.

She had been living alone with Tanyukha for three days and, accustomed as she was to the constant noise and scuffle of the children, the house had seemed quite empty and dead.

Her first meeting with her children came long before she reached the Sinelga, in the birch thickets beyond Terekhin's field. Out of long habit Anna had reached up for a birch twig with which to drive off the midges on her way through the forest. As soon as she broke one off, she noticed other broken twigs at the top of the bush. And a little farther on, on the other side of the track, some more twigs had been snapped off, but lower down.

That, of course, was the children's work. The ones from the bush she had chosen must have been taken by Mikhail, and those on the other side, by the twins. She could almost see them doing it.

The twins would have been running on ahead, showing off in front of their elder brother—look how fast we can run, just look, Misha!—and suddenly they had heard Mikhail breaking off the birch twigs. So, of course, they must have some too. Mikhail never did anything without a good reason. Or perhaps he himself had shouted, "Get yourselves some birch twigs, kids. Fascists in the air!" By which, of course, he meant the clegs and gadflies.

And the road went on telling her how the children had made their way before her.

Mikhail's boots left a deep imprint that no rain would wash away, and his stride was a good metre long, just like his father's. But the twins were like little fallow-deer, sometimes they left a footprint, sometimes not. They were so light.

Anna tried to plant her feet where her daughter had trod.

Lizka's stride was neither long nor short, about the same as hers, and the main thing was that Lizka picked her way carefully. Not like Mikhail. Puddles or bog, it was all the same to him. He just went straight on. No side-tracking for him. But Lizka was different. She would turn aside if need be, and even take a long way round to have dry land underfoot.

During the second verst, on the way past Goblin Marshes, Lizka's footprints suddenly disappeared. Anna looked all around her, but there was no sign of them.

She kept to the side of the road, along a thistle-grown ridge, following the marks left by Mikhail and the twins. But Lizka's footprints—a round heel with a big nail in it—did not reappear even after the mud. Eventually, however, the mark of a bare foot, long and narrow—Lizka's, Anna guessed—showed up on the track. It was those new boots—she hadn't wanted to spoil them. So when the mud started, she had taken them off. It was Stepan Andreyanovich who had brought those boots for Lizka at the last minute, when Mikhail and the boys were driving out of the lane. Lizka was the old man's favourite. He loved her more than many a man loves his own daughter. The year before it would have been all up with Lizka, working in the forest without felt boots, but Stepan Andreyanovich had come to the rescue. He had found the wool somewhere and rolled the felt himself.

Of course, a pair of top boots and felt boots as well made quite a big present considering the times they were living in, but Lizka was not in debt to the Stavrovs. After all, since 1942 she had been doing all the washing and scrubbing for the old man and his boy. That was worth something, surely?

And so it was, chatting with the children in her thoughts, observing their footprints and where they had stopped, that Anna reached the Sinelga almost without noticing it.

She really ought to have taken a rest and splashed some water on her face. She was so hot and sweaty. After all, she had not come empty-handed, but how could she think of rest or the cool of the river when the children were so close?

And there it was—her happiness, her big day, the joy she had longed and suffered for. The Pryaslin team out there on the hayfield—Mikhail, Lizaveta, Pyotr and Grigory.

She had got used to Mikhail. Since the age of fourteen he had been mowing like any man, there was no one to match him in all Pekashino. And the way Lizka wielded her scythe

was something to be envied. There was a skill in her that did not come from her mother, but from Granny Matryona, so they said. But just look at the little ones! They both had scythes and were hard at it, and the grass was going down around them.... Goodness, had she ever thought she would live to see such wonders! The twins had been out of luck since the day of their birth. Ever since they were born they had had to share everything: their mother's milk, their clothes, their boots. And probably the war had hit them hardest of all, but they had stood up to it and come through alive.

Mikhail's silvery scythe swung with a joyous whistle, but all that could be seen of Lizka, waist deep in the high grass, was the long braid streaming down her back, and the top of her linen dress, patched with sweat; and *ping-ping*, like the cry of the tomtits went the little scythes of the twins.

And apparently Anna was not the only one who was marvelling at what was going on at this hour on the hayfield under those tall birches with their crowns sparkling in the sunshine.

A big grey buzzard was circling overhead.

It flew round and round in silence and watched.

Watched and wondered.

* * *

Lizka was the first to see her mother and sang out for the whole field to hear.

"It's Mummy! Mummy's here!"

Then without a second thought she threw down her scythe on the stubble, ran up to her mother and helped her to take the knapsack off her back.

"And look at them!" she whispered urgently, nodding in the direction of the twins. "Just look at our men. Come on, there, don't show off! You know who's come!"

Pyotr and Grigory (Petka and Grishka for short) kept their end up and did not look round once, pretending to be far too busy for that kind of thing. They were working. And only when their elder brother announced that it was time for a break did they give vent to their feelings and come galloping over to see their mother.

"Mummy, Mummy, did you see us?"

"Yes, I saw you."

"Of course, she did," Lizka exclaimed laughing. "We

couldn't take our eyes off you. What fine lads they are, we said. We'd have to look a long way to find any workers as good as them."

"And where's the little one?" Anna asked, looking round on all sides. "Where's he disappeared to?"

"He's fishing," Lizka replied and pointed to a puff of smoke rising over the headland. "He's no good at mowing. He tried the day before yesterday. But it's the gadflies and the clegs, he says, and he just stood in the middle of the field, beating them off with a bunch of twigs. Fedka, I said, you're not in the bath-house. In a meadow you swing your scythe to drive the midges away, not a bunch of twigs."

Lizka was a grand girl for acting out a joke. Mikhail and the twins had come up by this time and she soon had them all laughing over her tale.

"He's too young yet," Anna put in her usual word for Fedka. "He'll mow all right when he grows up."

"He's not a bit too young," Lizka retorted. "He's a lot too lazy, that little one is."

"The gadflies don't bite us, Mummy. Look!" Petka and Grishka were not wearing *kukli*—cowls to protect them from the mosquitoes. They had taken them off in imitation of their elder brother, who had been going about bareheaded all summer.

But they shouldn't have done, Anna thought to herself. They're paid for their recklessness. The little boys' pale, bloodless faces were so badly bitten they were breaking out into sores and blisters.

The family sat down to rest on a mown hummock overlooking the Sinelga. Right in the heat of the sun. Here, at least, the mosquitoes were not so troublesome.

Mikhail had put the birch-bark milk jar into the river under a dense bush of bird-cherry, and had hung the knapsack with the loaves in it on the withered branch of a birch-tree—there were plenty of mice about on the banks of the Sinelga.

Anna, gasping in the heat (all of them, except Mikhail, had gathered round their mother), began to pass on the village news. There was quite a variety: the collective farm had allotted two kilos of flour for each person working on the mowing; a boy had been drowned in Zaozerye and they had been dragging the lake for him for nearly two days running; Zvezdonya the cow was milking badly because of the heat

and she had been unable to lay in any cream.

"And what else?" Anna spread her hands questioningly. "Oh, yes, I forgot. The Lobanovs' girl Anisya has gone off to town and taken the children with her."

"So she decided to go after all?" Mikhail asked thoughtfully.

"That was because of her passport," Lizka said. "She mentioned it last week. My passport is running out, she says. I don't know what to do about it."

"Anisya was having a pretty rough time, that's why she left," said Mikhail. "Just you try it with three kids to feed and no cow, starting right from scratch...." He rubbed his dark unshaven cheek with his hand. "She asked me, 'Can't you advise me what to do, Mikhail?' she says. But what kind of adviser is work-team leader in a case like that? How could I tell her, 'You'd better leave'? But on the other hand, I couldn't bring myself to persuade her to stay."

"How's that cry-baby?" Lizka brought the conversation back to her own family again. "She must have cried her eyes out by now?"

"Tatyana? She was still asleep when I left. Semyonovna said she'd take her."

Mikhail puffed for a while at a home-made cigarette, then started fixing a scythe for his mother.

Lizka got up, too, and retrieved her expensive present from the grass. She had been sitting with her feet bare, so as not to fry the boots in the hot sun. She slipped them on quickly.

"What shall we do about these two?" Anna nodded over her shoulder, afraid to move.

Petka and Grishka had toiled so hard that as soon as they put their arms round their mother's back they had nodded off to sleep. She could feel it by their hot breathing and the relaxed heaviness of their small bodies leaning against her.

Mikhail shouted, "Wakey-wakey, mates!"

And the twins were on their feet in a twinkling. As if they had not been asleep at all. They blinked a couple of times and their eyes were as clear as spring water—you could see right to the bottom. Like the Sinelga in fine weather.

"We weren't asleep. We were just pretending, weren't we, Grisha?"

"All right, boys, don't upset yourselves," Anna reassured them. "I nearly dropped off myself."

The sun was reaching to its full noonday power. The

meadow was alive with the hum of gadflies and clegs. Mikhail and Lizka walked off into the grass in calm, workmanlike style, and soon they were cutting it up into "streets" and "side-streets". But what should she, Anna, do?

The twins had settled down on a shady berry patch and were calling, "Mummy, Mummy, come and be with us!" At any other time she would gladly have joined them (she had never been any good with a scythe), but today that was out of the question. She simply couldn't.

For how many years had she cherished the thought of this family happiness in her heart, the greatest joy in her life? How could she sit in the shade and just look on?

She picked up her scythe and followed the elder ones—Mikhail and Lizka.

* * *

"Oo-oo!" Mikhail drank half a kettle in one go, without taking his mouth from the spout. "Who else wants some? Come and get it!"

Petka and Grishka (surely they had drunk enough, they had only just fetched the water) pounced on the kettle as thirstily as Mikhail.

"Good lads, both of you! When the turnips are ready in autumn, I'll recommend you all for the Order of the Holy Turnip. And mother too—I'd give her a Rotten Radish Medal right now, that I would!"

Mikhail was pleased. They had mown a good deal of grass since morning.

His praise gave the twins new legs and they dashed off to the log hut to light a fire before the grown-ups got there.

But it was her mother that astonished Lizka. She flushed as if it wasn't her own son who had praised her, but at least the District Party Secretary. Still, if you came to think of it.... Mother had a lovely face, even the war hadn't spoiled it, but she was not blessed with a good pair of hands. There was no grip and nimbleness in her fingers. So, of course, she blushed when a mower like Mikhail praised her. She was as much a human being as anyone else, she, too, wanted to hear a kind word sometimes.

When the three of them reached the hut, flames were blazing under the bars and a kettle and pot were hanging from the hooks.

"Are we going to cook anything?" the twins wanted to know.

"Yes, we are," Lizka answered. "We're going to treat our guest to some fish. Now then, what are you standing there for? Harness up and drive out to meet the fisherman. There'll be such a catch, you'll need a cart to carry it."

Petka and Grishka appreciated the joke and shook their heads in delight.

And suddenly all of them—the boys, their mother and Lizka herself—craned their necks and stared in fright towards the spot where Fedka had been fishing, and whence there now rose a wild howl. Then they saw Fedka himself. He was running for all he was worth across the meadow, screaming his head off, and hard on his heels—*clumpety-clump*, they could hear his heavy footsteps from the hut—came Mikhail. With a long birch rod. Mikhail caught Fedka at the stream by the hut, tumbled him to the ground, and soon had the switch dancing up and down the boy's back.

His mother broke into sighs and gasps, but she was not the one to shout, "Stop! Don't you dare touch him, you monster! You'll cripple the child." No, she wouldn't do that. You would never hear anything of that kind from Mother. No matter what Mikhail did or said, she would never object. He was the master.

So it was Lizka who had to use her voice. What she shouted at that moment, what words she used to sting that devil, Lizka forgot as soon as she uttered them. But they helped Fedka. He wriggled out of his brother's grip and jumped over the stream, and then his mother spoke up.

"Fedyà, Fedyà, come to me." And she actually held out her arms.

But no, it was not to his own mother that Fedka ran for protection, but to her, to Lizka. He flung both arms round his sister and held on like grim death. And Lizka hugged him to her, shielded him with her own body—let Mikhail hit her rather than the child.

Mikhail did not hit her. He broke the rod into little pieces over his knee and looked so fierce that she was really frightened. He was all wet, the sweat was pouring down his cheeks, and his teeth were bared in a snarl. Their brother had never been a gentle one. His eyes blazed as soon as anything rubbed him up the wrong way, but before his illness it had

never been this bad, he had never gone right off his head like this.

Over dinner no one spoke a word. No one moved. Only the two boys, furtively, without letting their brother see, sent pitying looks towards the hut where Fedka was sitting it out. Then they began to look worriedly at their sister and at their mother. The milk was nearly finished, they hadn't made any soup, of course, so what about Fedka? What would he get?

"Finish it up! That devil's not going to have a single drop."

And again it was not the mother but she, Lizka, who had to stand up to Mikhail.

She licked her spoon carefully and said, "You can punish the boys how you like, but you're not going to starve them. It's not the old days."

He let that one go, just stood up and walked off to the hut.

Lizka shrank into herself, thinking what was going to happen to Fedka now. But again the storm passed over. Mikhail took up the rake and fork he had left by the hut and went off to the meadow.

* * *

A troubled hush settled on the family. The master had gone off without a word. Fedka was sitting there hungry. What should they do with him? Could they give him something to eat without violating their brother's orders? Lizka glanced at her mother—let's put our heads together on this. But her mother, like the twins, gazed imploringly at her. Help us out, Lizka.

Lizka made up her mind.

"Call out that rascal."

Fedka emerged from the hut, escorted by his brothers. His plump lips were pouted and ready for tears, but he didn't look exactly frightened to death.

"What were you up to over there, you monster? Out with it!"

"Nothing."

"You wouldn't have been chased all the way across the meadow for nothing. And with a switch behind you. When has Mikhail ever beaten someone for nothing? Eh?"

"I only went to sleep for a minute." Fedka snuffled.

"To sleep?" Lizka nearly choked with indignation. "You went to sleep when you were supposed to be working? What do you mean by it, red face? Off to bed with you! You

deserved a proper hiding, I'd say. You didn't get half enough."

At this point the twins burst out crying in sympathy for their little brother. Their mother also took his part and Lizka was upset and just couldn't squeeze the whole truth out of Fedka. Only some time later did Mikhail tell them what all the fuss had been about.

"I made him a place fit for a tsar, honestly I did. I lighted a fire to keep the midges off, dragged over a great big log for him and cleared a patch of grass. Make a good catch, lad, I said, and treat your mother to some fresh fish. And that lad, he showed me what he could do. He pulled a dace out of the river, fried it then and there, on the hot embers, and gobbled it down himself. Honestly he did! There he was snoring by the fire, covered with grass, safe from the flies, and his face all in fish scales. Like he'd got scald. That really shook me up. You young villain, I thought! Is that how you carry out my orders. And then I saw he even had some salt in a bit of newspaper—to make the fresh fish go down better. See what I mean? That little snake had prepared it all beforehand, even supplied himself with salt. That was what got my rag out!"

Mikhail told the story with a laugh, but it had been no laughing matter at the time. It was some time since Mikhail had gone off to the meadow and there was still no sign of him. What should they do? From the look of the grass they ought to start raking. But suppose he had some other plan in mind. Then he would come back and say, "Couldn't you have thought of a little thing like that!"

For not less than half an hour they stood by the hut, not knowing what to do and staring worriedly across the meadow, in the direction their brother had taken. At last he reappeared. He came out from the bushes, his head wet and gleaming in the sunshine—he must have been swimming—and began to rake the hay.

Lizka said with relief, "We'd better start too. It's high time. We're a stupid lot, boys. Who would scold us for working? And you, young imp," she told Fedka, "don't you dare show yourself. Get me?" Lizka put on a terrible frown and, just for form's sake, gave him a gentle cuff. "Until I wave my kerchief there's not to be a smell of you on the meadow!"

They made their way down to the stream cautiously and uncertainly and came out on the edge of the stubble. The hay

was dry and smelled good. A fresh breeze was blowing from the Sinelga.

Lizka shouted, "Where shall we start raking from?"

Not a word. His anger had not passed yet. He tossed a forkful of hay and that was the only sound from the meadow.

His mother sighed and this time Lizka felt really angry: how could she have sunk to this, to being afraid of her own son?

Lizka said vexedly, "Start from here. This hay has got to be raked some time or other."

They worked fast. Everyone—Mother, the twins, Lizka—did their best. They almost ran about with their rakes, knowing that if anything would soothe Mikhail now, it was hard work. And sure enough, Mikhail gradually began to glance in their direction—at first, as if to watch the sun, and then to look at their heaps of hay.

Then Lizka decided to finish her brother off—by sending him the twins.

Petka and Grishka approached their elder brother slowly, quietly. Just a swish or two in the hay with their rakes and all the time getting nearer to Mikhail's white shirt. And when they were quite near, they really pitched in.

And a minute or two later Mikhail's voice was heard:

"Mother, what are you up to on the edge there? Haven't you ever been hay-making before?"

And this meant: How much longer can you go on sulking? You'd better come over here (that was as much as Mikhail was capable of at the moment).

Lizka took the white kerchief off her head and, quite openly now, waved it at Fedka. Come on! Your term is up. And with real delight she let her eyes run over the bare meadow.

How lovely the meadow was in full flower. Like a brightly coloured shawl. And it was lovely again when spread with the fragrant, honey-scented swathes of the mown grass. But best of all she loved it when it was quite bare, when it had just been cleared of hay.

1967

Translated by Robert Daglish

V. Shukshin

(b. 1929, Srostki village,
Altai—d. 1974,
Kletskaya stanitsa near Vol-
gograd, buried in Moscow)

The writer Vassili Shukshin died while playing one of the main parts in a film based on Mikhail Sholokhov's novel THEY FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY. The untimely death of this gifted and versatile artist—besides being an actor-producer he wrote novels, short stories and film scripts—became an event of national mourning.

The son of a peasant, he worked as a fitter on leaving school, then served in the navy, and returned to his native village to become the principal of an evening school there, thus gaining much useful experience early in life. He was nearly 30 when his first short stories appeared in a volume called COUNTRY PEOPLE. At 32 he graduated from the All-Union Institute of Cinematography. As fate willed, he had less than fifteen years to live, but what years they were! His films (A LAD DOWN OUR WAY, THE RED SNOW-BALL-TREE, and others) reached the screen regularly, winning him wide renown and popularity. Shukshin's

characters (he scripted the films himself) are emotionally responsive, ingenuous people, quick to react to the good and bad in life, and quite often they are misdoers or have a quirk of some kind or other.

Shukshin's preference for unusual characters rapidly widened to take in such national heroes as Stepan Razin, leader of one of the peasant uprisings of the 17th century, while his critical eye focused on various forms of money-grubbing, demagoguery and bureaucracy. The democratic content of his work, his love of the working man, his attention to the complexities of development were combined with a uniquely democratic form, an ability to penetrate to the very core of colloquial speech.

Shukshin's brief but eventful life in art was like the explosion of a star. "If Vassili Shukshin had been only an actor, only a director, only a writer and dramatist, we would still have been confronted with an exceptional talent. But all these gifts belong to one man. Our art has never known such an astonishing combination," comments the well-known Soviet writer Sergei Zalygin.

The Suraz¹

Spirka Rastorguev was thirty-six but looked about twenty-five, not more.

He was startlingly handsome; on Saturdays he would go to the baths for a good steaming, rip off the week's driving dirt, put on a clean shirt, drink a glass of vodka—and he was a young god! Clear, intelligent eyes, womanish lips blossoming scarlet on the brown face. Close-knit brows sweeping up capriciously, like a pair of raven's wings. But why, in the devil's name!... Nature plays these tricks sometimes. What did he need it all for? He himself liked to say he was "easy" about it. He was "easy" about everything. Thirty-six years of age and no family, no proper home. He liked doing his own thing—getting his tongue round the wildest oaths he could think of and keeping lonely women company at nights. He went to them all, without choosing. That was another thing he was "easy" about. The older and uglier they were, the better he liked them—just to be bloody-minded.

"Spirka, you fool, don't spite your own face! What a one to pick on—lumpy Lizka, the face-grater! Haven't you any pride!"

"It's not the face that counts," Spirka opined reasonably. "She may be a grater but she's a lot kinder than any of you."

Spirka's life had gone askew early. Things started happening to him when he was still only in his fifth year at school. The teacher of German, a quiet, touchy old woman, a wartime evacuee, was bowled over by his looks.

"A little Byron! What an astonishing resemblance!"

Spirka hated the old lady ever after.

As soon as they started a session of *Anna und Marta baden*, he began to feel depressed. Off she would go again, "No, it really is astonishing!... A perfect little Byron!" It got on his nerves. One day the old girl started off as usual, "Quite extraordinary, no one would believe it, a perfect little By..." But she got no further.

"By all the..." And Spirka let fly with a string of oaths that a drunken cobbler would have been ashamed to utter.

¹ The Siberian word has two meanings: (1) born out of wedlock and (2) an unexpected and disastrous event.—*Tr.*

The old lady's eyes jumped on to her forehead. Later she said, "No, I wasn't shocked. I had been a nurse in 1914. So I have seen and heard plenty in my time. But what astonished me was—how could he have got to know such words? And such a beautiful face! A perfect little Byron!"

"Byron" got a merciless beating from his mother. He stayed in bed till he felt better, then set out for the fighting front. He got as far as Novosibirsk before he was sent home. His mother gave him another ruthless beating, then spent the night lamenting over her son. She had had Spirka from a handsome young man of no fixed address, so she loved and hated the father in the son. Spirka was a chip of the old block, even in character, though he had never set eyes on his father.

He would not go back to school, despite all his mother's cajolings and beatings. When he threatened to jump off the roof on to a pitchfork, his mother had to retreat. And Spirka went to work on a collective farm.

He grew up into a brash, cheeky lad, disobedient and unruly, always getting into fights. In the end his mother couldn't take any more and just gave up.

"Let him do what he likes. Perhaps they'll put him away for a bit."

And they did. After the war. He and a mate of his, as far gone as himself, held up a shop delivery waggon from the neighbouring village and took a crate of vodka off the driver, and even gave him—a grown man—something to remember them by. Then they threw a wild party at Spirka's girl-friend's place and that was where the militia caught them. Spirka managed to grab a gun and ran to the bath-house, where he held out for nearly two days, shooting at anyone who came near. They even sent in his girl-friend Verka ("Chatty Verka") to persuade him to give himself up. But that fool of a woman took him a bottle of vodka and some more cartridges under her skirt. She was in there with him for a long time and when she finally appeared, announced proudly, "He won't come out!"

Spirka kept up his fusillade from the bath-house window, accompanying it with a song about the cruiser *Varangian*:

*Our proud Varangian will never surrender.
And no one for mercy will plead.*

"Spirka, every shot you fire means another year!"

“Mind you keep count then!” Spirka shouted back and blazed away from the window. When he sobered up, he began to feel desperately sleepy, so he threw the gun out of the window and came out.

He was “away” for five years.

He returned home just as wildly handsome as before, just as unruly and unexpectedly generous. He would astonish as much by his generosity as his good looks. He would give away his last shirt to someone in need. Sometimes on a day-off he would drive out to the forest, work like mad, and come back in the evening with a load of fire-wood for someone old and lonely... When he had unloaded it all himself he would walk into the house.

“Now what can we give you for all this, Spirka, our good angel?” the old folk would say, fumbling about.

And that made Spirka feel good.

“A glass of vodka,” he would answer, eyeing them with curiosity. “Well, I’m not such a bad cock, am I? By all that’s...” And then followed his usual blast of invective.

But when Spirka came back from prison, his mates had all gone away and his girl-friends were married. People thought he would go away too, but he didn’t. He enjoyed himself for a bit, gave his money to his mother, and took a job as a driver.

And that was how Spirka lived.

That spring two new people came to live in the village of Yasnoye, Sergei and Irina Zelenetsky, both teachers, husband and wife. Sergei was a physical education instructor. Irina taught singing.

Sergei was a stocky, broad-shouldered, muscular man with a springy walk, good at jumping and somersaulting. It was a treat to watch him practising seriously and enthusiastically on the bar, the parallel bars, the rings. He had an exceptionally broad and kind mouth, a rather fleshy and flattish nose, and big widely spaced, very white teeth.

Irina was small and pale, with a slim girlish figure. Nothing special to look at, but when she slipped off her raincoat in the common room and reached up on tip-toe to lift the heavy accordion down from the top of the cupboard—what poise. Where did she get it from? And it was attractive.

This was the couple (they were both about thirty or thirty-two) that came to live in Yasnoye in the fine warm days

at the end of April. Lodgings were found for them in a roomy house belonging to an elderly couple, the Proskudins.

Their first visitor was Spirka. He had a habit of coming to see new people. He would walk in and introduce himself, drink a glass with his hosts (Spirka drank, but was seldom drunk), chat with them for a while and take his leave.

So one evening Spirka had a wash and shave, put on his best suit and went to the Proskudins.

"I'll just drop in and see what kind of people they are," he told his mother.

The old couple were having supper.

"Sit down and have a bite, Spiridon." Spirka helped the old folk sometimes and they were fond of him.

"Thanks, I've just had mine. Are your lodgers at home?"

"In there." The old man nodded towards the front room. "Making up their bed."

"What are they like?"

"All right, considerate. They gave us this cheese and sausage. Try some."

Spirka shook his head and went to the front room. He tapped on the door.

"Come in!" a voice responded.

Spirka went in.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo!" the couple answered together, and stared. People always did at Spirka. They couldn't help it.

Spirka made his own introductions.

"Spiridon Rastorguyev."

"Sergei."

"Irina. Won't you sit down."

As he pressed Irina's small warm hand Spirka inspected her curiously from top to toe, quite openly. Irina frowned a little, then smiled, for some reason withdrew her hand quickly, and quickly went out to fetch a chair. When she came back she looked at Spirka not exactly with surprise, but with a great deal of interest.

Spirka sat down.

Sergei looked at him cheerfully.

"Welcome to Yasnoye," Spirka said.

"Thank you."

"I just dropped in to see how you were getting on," their guest explained. "The way people are here, you could

go old and grey waiting for them to take any interest.”

“Are they not sociable?”

“Like everywhere else—like to keep themselves to themselves.”

“Are you a local person?”

“Sure I am. Siberian born and bred.”

“Sergei, I’ll get something to eat.”

“Go ahead!” Sergei responded readily and gave Spirka another cheerful look. “We’ll celebrate our house-warming with Spiridon here.”

“Yes, we can have a glass or two,” Spirka consented. “Where are you from?”

“Not far away.”

Irina went to the old people’s room; Spirka’s eyes followed her.

“What’s the life like here?” Sergei asked.

“The life...” Spirka paused, but not in search of words. He had felt a sudden regret that this little woman would not hear what he had to say about life. “Well, life comes in patches, doesn’t it? First there’s a good patch, then a bad one...” No, he really didn’t want to talk at the moment. “Why has she gone out there? You’ve only got to tell the old folk, they’ll get you what you want.”

“But why? That’s her affair. Well, what kind of patch are you going through at the moment?”

“Six of one and half a dozen of the other. Not so bad, on the whole...” No, he definitely didn’t want to talk while she was out of the room, making that stupid “something to eat”.

“Mind if I smoke?”

“No, go ahead.”

“So you’re going to teach here, are you?”

“Yes.”

“What’s she a teacher of?”

“Singing.”

“Oh, is she a good singer?” Spirka asked with interest.

“She sings.”

“Maybe she’ll sing us a song?”

“You can ask her. She might.”

“I’ll go and tell the old folk myself. She’s wasting her time out there.”

He went out and they came back together. Irina was carrying a plate of cheese, sausage and fatback.

"I agreed not to cook anything," she said.

"Good."

"Yes, what the ... what for!" Spirka nearly came out with one of his usual qualifiers. "A cucumber and a bit of fatback—what could be better! Isn't that right?" Spirka glanced at his host.

"You know best," Sergei replied rather briskly, but informally.

Spirka noted the familiarity. That was all to the good. He missed the glances that the couple exchanged. He was in high spirits. Now they would have a glass of vodka, and then—well, then he would see what happened.

It was brandy not vodka that appeared on the table.

"I always have my glass right away, and that's it. D'you mind?"

Spirka was politely allowed the privilege.

He gulped the brandy and helped it down with a small piece of sausage.

"There we are!" he gave a little shiver. "That got down to the permafrost, as they say."

Husband and wife drank a small glass each. Spirka watched the quiver in the woman's tender throat. And something—either brandy or blood—surged hot and heavy into his heart. His hands just itched to fondle that little throat. His eyes brightened, his glance became more intelligent, and he felt just grand.

"That's real fine brandy," he said approvingly. "But it's too pricey."

Sergei laughed; Spirka was not with him.

"What could be better than moonshine, eh?" Sergei asked. "Cheap and rough!"

"Now, what can I tell them to make 'em laugh?" Spirka was thinking.

"Not much moonshine about now," he said. "That was during the war..." And he remembered the grind of those hard faraway years, the belt-tightening, the ploughing that was too much for any boy... And he suddenly wanted to describe it in a funny way. He lifted his handsome head, looked straight at the woman on the other side of the table, and smiled.

"Shall I tell what kind of life I've had?"

Irina hastily averted her glance and looked at her husband.

"Yes, go ahead, Spiridon," Sergei said. "We'd like to hear about your life."

Spirka lighted a cigarette.

"I'm a suraz," he began.

"A what?" Irina asked.

"Mother brought me home in her apron. There was a dandy young fellow around here buying up skins—what they call a supply agent. And while he was about it he supplied me."

"Do you know him?"

"Never set eyes on him. He never appeared after he got Mum in the family way. Later he got arrested and nothing's been heard of him since. Must have gone for the high jump. So that's the way I came into the world...." And just as suddenly as he had wanted to give a cheerful account of his life, he suddenly lost all desire to do so. It wasn't particularly funny. What could he tell them about—the labour camp? Spirka looked at Irina and that overpowering desire to touch her throat got hold of him again.

He stood up.

"Well, I've got to be on my way. I've a trip to make. Thanks for the drink."

"A trip at this time of night?" Irina said in surprise.

"Yes, we have to sometimes. Bye for now. I'll drop in again sometime."

Spirka went out without looking back.

"He's a strange lad," Irina remarked after a silence.

"Handsome, you mean?"

"Yes, he is."

"Handsome... And you know what—he's fallen for you."

"Has he?"

"And he's got under your skin too, I think. Hasn't he?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh yes, he has."

"D'you want that to happen?"

"Why not? Only—you'd never cope."

The woman looked at her husband.

"You'd get scared," he said. "It takes courage."

"Oh, leave off," his wife said seriously. "What's the matter with you?"

"Courage and, of course, energy," her husband continued. "You have to be in good form, so to speak. He is. He'll cope. Incidentally, he's been in prison."

"What gave you that idea?"

"You don't believe it? Go and ask the old people."

"Ask them yourself, if you must."

"Why not?"

Her husband went to speak to the old couple.

Five minutes later he came back and announced with clownish solemnity:

"Five years! In a strict regime camp. For robbery."

The damp evening air freshened his burning face. Spirka walked on, smoking. He suddenly wanted it to rain, a real downpour, with the sky all jagged with lightning and thunder booming overhead. Then what? Have a real good shout.

He set off for his current "pad"—to Nyura Zavyalova's.

He tapped on the window.

"Who's that?" the sleepy Nyura asked curtly, appearing as a dim white blob against the pane.

Spirka kept silent and thought about Nyura. During the war, when Nyura was about twenty-three and had been left a widow with two little children on her hands, Spirka (he was thirteen at the time) had dropped a sack of grain into her kitchen garden at night (he was carting a load to town for milling). He had tapped on this same window and said in a quick whisper, "Have a look in your garden, by the bath-house... And hide it well away!"

Two days later, when he came to see Nyura again, also at night, she flew at him, "What d'you think you're up to, Spirka, you little snake. Do you want to get me into prison?! Want to keep yourself well fed by planting the stuff on others?!"

Spirka was staggered.

"I didn't do it for myself! What are you all het up about?"

"Who for then?"

"You. They've got to have something to eat!" He meant Nyura's children. "They must be real hungry, I reckon."

Nyura went off into tears and started kissing and hugging Spirka. And Spirka, deeply moved, swore for all he was worth.

"Well, there you are... You can grind it yourself and bake some bread in hot ash. There's nothing tastier."

That was the memory that had come back to him all of a sudden.

"What're you standing there for?" Nyura asked. "The door's open... Don't wake the old folk."

Spirka stood and waited. There was a vein of mischievous curiosity in his character. What would she do next?

"Spirka!... What are you playing at?"

Silence.

"Aren't you coming in?"

Silence.

"Oh, you silly loon! He wakes you up, then starts his tricks... Well, go to the devil then!" And Nyura went back to bed.

Spirka crept silently through the first room, where Nyura's parents were snoring, and reached the front room.

"What are all the antics for?"

Spirka felt unbearably sorry for Nyura. Why act like this? It would have been better not to come.

"Forget it, Nyura. Let's sleep."

Three days later, Spirka called on the Proskudins in the evening. The lodgers were not at home. Spirka talked to the old folk while he waited.

Irina came in first, alone. So fresh and clever. And with her came the cool freshness of the spring evening. She looked surprised and, so it seemed to Spirka, pleased.

Calm, resolute, he followed her into the front room.

"Bunch of flowers," he said, and handed her a flaming posy of *zharki*.

"Oh!" she was even more pleased. "What lovely things! What are they called? I've never seen that kind before."

"*Zharki*." Something was singing gaily in Spirka's chest, as it always did when he was about to have a fight or a woman. He made no attempt to hide his love. "I'll bring you flowers often."

"But why should you?... It's extra work."

"Oh what a job," Spirka countered playfully. "I'm always driving past, they're so thick you could mow 'em with a scythe." He reflected that it was a good thing, after all, that he had such good looks. Anyone else would have had the boot by now. He smiled, he felt on top of the world.

The woman also began to laugh, and then looked embarrassed. Spirka relished every moment. It was like drinking from a cool spring on a very hot day and dipping your whole face into the water. He was drinking and drinking and an aching

shiver ran through his body like fire. He took the woman's hand... It was like a dream—if only he would never wake!

She tried to take her hand away. Spirka didn't let it go.

"But why?... Really, you shouldn't."

"Why shouldn't I?" Everything he knew, everything that had always worked unfailingly on other women he longed to bring to bear on this sweet frail creature. A prayer went up from his heart: "Lord, help me! Please, don't let her kick!" He drew the woman into his arms... He saw her eyes, very close, surprised, growing wider. Now don't waver, don't let go. "Oh God, all I want now is to kiss her—that's all, nothing more." And he kissed her. And fondled her white tender little throat... And again kissed those soft, yielding lips. Then her husband came in... Spirka didn't hear him, he only saw the woman's head jerk and the flash of fright in her eyes... Then he heard a voice behind him, such a familiar voice:

"The scene as before. Enter husband."

Spirka released the woman. He felt neither shame nor fear.

He was just sorry—and riled at this well-groomed, straight-backed, self-confident man. The master! One of those lucky devils, everything under control, always welcome. He looked round at the husband.

"Quite a lad, eh! Well, did you get very far?"

Sergei meant to smile, but the smile would not come. His eyes narrowed and the fleshy lips trembled resentfully. He looked at his wife. "Why are you so quiet? And pale too?!" The fierce, angry shout lashed her like a whip. "You whore! So you did get somewhere!?" He stepped towards her. Spirka barred the way. Close up he saw the fury and resentment burning in the schoolmaster's dark eyes. He also noticed the faint cool odour of Eau-de-Cologne from his clean-shaven cheeks.

"Keep calm," said Spirka.

The next moment a short strong arm plucked Spirka out of the front room.

"Come along, handsome!"

Spirka just couldn't do anything about that arm. It seemed to have welded itself on to the back of his neck and its strength was superhuman. It was like a piston rod propelling him along from behind.

Spirka was dragged through the old people's room; the couple stared at their lodger and Spirka in astonishment.

"I've just caught a dirty young Tom," the lodger explained.

Terrible things were brewing in Spirka's heart! A mixture of humiliation, pain, fury was choking him.

"What are you doing, you bastard!" he groaned.

They came out on to the porch. The piston went into action. Spirka flew down from the high porch and measured his length on the wet straw that had been spread for wiping one's feet.

"I'll kill him!" the thought flashed through Spirka's head. Sergei walked down the steps.

"Get up!"

Spirka was up before the words reached him... And the next moment he was down again. And with disgust and horror came the realisation: "He's beating me up!" Again he sprang up and tried to duck under that dreadful piston—to get at the P.E. instructor's throat. But a second piston jabbed him hard on the jaw. Spirka fell over backwards with a taste of brass in his mouth. Once again he hurled himself at the schoolmaster. He was a good fighter, but fury, pain, humiliation and the feeling of not being able to cope with those pistons had robbed him of his former agility and control. Blind fury threw him forward again and again and the pistons worked with splendid efficiency. He didn't get near the schoolmaster once. Eventually he was knocked down and stayed down. The schoolmaster bent over him.

"I'll fix you," Spirka mumbled weakly, but seriously.

"We shall consider that a lesson in good manners. You had better drop your prison habits." The schoolmaster's voice was mild, but serious too.

"I'll kill you," Spirka said distinctly. There was a nasty mess in his mouth, as if he had been chewing a bottle of Eau-de-Cologne—everything was cut and burned. "I'll kill you, remember."

"What for?" the schoolmaster asked calmly.

"Remember."

The schoolmaster went back into the house, closed the door and bolted it.

Spirka tried to get up and couldn't. His head was buzzing, but the thoughts came clearly. He knew a way down from the roof of the Proskudins' house into the store-room. The store-room was never locked—just a loop of string over a nail, to stop the door opening by itself. The old people's room

was never locked either and there was no lock at all on the door of the front room. He knew the Proskudins' house so well because their son, Mishka, had been a friend of his when they were kids and Spirka had often stayed the night there. Mishka was gone, but the old folk kept everything the same as before, of course.

At last Spirka dragged himself to his feet, clung to the wall of the house for a bit and stumbled away down to the river. Slowly his strength returned.

He washed his bruised face and struck matches to examine his suit and shirt. He didn't want his mother to see any signs of blood and get suspicious when he went in for the gun. Any excuse would do for taking it. He could say he had a load of seed grain to deliver and wanted to do a spot of shooting by the lake on the way back.

His mother was in bed.

"Is that you, Spirka?" she asked in a sleepy whisper from the stove.

"Yes. Go to sleep. I've got a trip to make."

"Have some fried potatoes, they're still hot in the stove. And there's milk in the porch. You must have something to eat before you go."

"All right, I'll take it with me." Quietly, without putting on the light Spirka took the shot-gun down from the wall, and for bluff's sake made a bit of noise in the porch... Then he went back into the house (leaving the gun in the porch), reached up beside the stove, found his mother's head in the darkness and stroked her thin warm hair. Sometimes, when he was a bit drunk, he liked to caress his mother; so now it caused her no alarm.

"Been drinking, have you?... How can you drive then?" His mother had come to love him more and more as the years went by. She was ashamed that he didn't seem able to get himself a family—always a loner, not like other respectable folk! Her only hope now was that some decent-living widow or divorced woman would come their way.

"It's nothing. I'd better go."

"Well, Christ be with you." His mother blessed him in the darkness. "Drive slowly, don't belt along like a madman as you usually do."

"I'll be all right," Spirka was forcing himself to sound cheerful. He wanted to get away as soon as possible and

somehow forget his mother. That's the person it's hard to leave in this life—your mother.

He walked down the dark street, gripping his gun. He was still trying to throw off the thought of his mother. She'd never get over it. When they brought him in, with his hands tied behind his back, and when she saw him... Spirka quickened his pace. "Oh God, give her the strength to bear it," he pleaded. He was almost running and in the end he did run. And he was excited, as if he was going in, not for the kill, but to jump into bed with Irina, all warm and willing. And he actually saw her in his mind's eye, but she suddenly disappeared. Those lips of hers, soft, half open, but he couldn't enjoy the memory because of the taste of blood in his mouth and ... yes, that was it, the Eau-de-Cologne chill from the schoolmaster's smooth cheeks. That scented cool came to him again now.

Spirka ran along humming to himself to keep his courage up.

*Will my raven steed
Take the bit 'tween his teeth?
Will my love...*

The house was in darkness. "Aha, here we are then," Spirka murmured to himself. "Now we take a ladder... Up it goes... Quiet now." He climbed down safely into the store-room and stood listening—not a sound. Only his heart pounding against his ribs. Keep calm, Spirka! No sound either as the string broke, except for the slight ping of the nail. Spirka reached forward with his free hand and made his way silently through the inner porch, groped lightly for the door and found it. "Here we are..." He bent down, pushed his fingers under the door, lifted it as far as he could and pulled. The door opened with a soft pleasant "pah", and swung back soundlessly. The place smelled of old people, of damp sheepskin, the warm stove, dough... This was where he had been marched out by the scruff of the neck. Oh God, don't let the old folk wake up. His fear now was that someone might stop him... "What a bashing he gave me! What a bashing! He knows how it's done."

Spirka was surprised at his own ease and agility. He couldn't even hear himself. He found the door of the front

room, lifted it from below—and he was there! In the darkness of the front room, slightly diluted by the light of a street lamp, the bed creaked. Spirka found the light switch and turned it on. Sergei was sitting up in bed staring at him. Irina also sat up... First she stared at her husband, then her glance rebounded from him on to Spirka and his gun. Her mouth opened soundlessly... Spirka realised that Sergei had not been asleep—there was too much understanding in those dark motionless eyes.

“I warned I’d fix you,” Spirka said. He tried to cock the hammers of the shot-gun but they were cocked already. (When had he done it?). “I told you, didn’t I!”

Spirka was suddenly disturbed by the fact that Irina was wearing only a slip. One shoulder strap was down and a firm white breast that had never suckled, was showing to the nipple. He hastily looked away.

The couple said nothing and stared at Spirka.

“Get up,” Spirka commanded. “We’ll go outside.”

“Spiridon... They’ll shoot you for this. Surely you...”

“I know. Get up.”

“Spiridon! But surely... Forgive me, Spiridon!”

“Get up!”

Sergei jumped out of bed in his vest and pants.

And suddenly Irina began to scream, and in such a terrible way, so loud and frenziedly, so urgently that it was not like her at all—such a small, clever woman with warm soft lips. It just didn’t sound human, it was so bitter and despairing... She fell out of bed and crawled with outstretched arms towards him.

“Don’t! Don’t! Oh, please, oh, oh, oh!” And she tried to clasp the gun, still on her knees...

At that moment Sergei sprang open-armed at Spirka—and received a blow in the chest with the butt of the gun that floored him.

“Please, dearest... Oh, don’t!” the little woman wailed. It was as if she had forgotten Spirka’s name. “G-o-oh!”

The old couple in the other room were also roused and crying out.

“Don’t!” Irina screamed.

Spirka was dumbfounded. He pushed her away, and then quite clearly he realised that if he pulled the trigger now there would be no forgiveness and no drink would ever drown the

thought of what he had done. If only she hadn't howled like this!... The strength she had in her!

Spirka swore... He walked out of the room and away from the dark house. Somehow he suddenly felt very tired. He remembered his mother and started to run. He wanted to run away from this thought of his mother, from all thoughts. He recalled Irina, kneeling there naked, and his heart burned with love and pity for her. And for a minute he was glad he hadn't fired the fatal shot... God, how she had screamed! And how she would have screamed and wept over her dead husband! Then back again to his mother... That was the one who would howl now! Spirka ran even faster. He reached the cemetery, and sat down on the ground. It was dark. He pointed the gun barrels at his heart, reached for the triggers, thought to himself, "Well... Is this all?" His fingers felt the two cold thin hoops—and pressed them both at once. At the last moment he tried to think of something big and important, but it was too late. Something hit him very hard and painlessly in the chest. He fell flat on his back and the dark sky seemed to drop softly over him. And yet at the very last he did manage to think, not really think, just feel surprise that it didn't hurt. And that was all.

The short mixed-up life of Spiridon Rastorguyev on this earth was over.

1970

Translated by Robert Daglish

A large, stylized, handwritten signature of O. Kuvayev in black ink. The signature is highly decorative, with long, sweeping strokes and a prominent flourish at the end.

(b. 1934, Ponazyrevo near Kostroma—
d. 1975, Kaliningrad near Moscow).

Well known as a geologist both in the field (he had led prospecting parties in the Far North) and in the laboratory (head of a large research department), Oleg Kuvayev won a place in Soviet literature with his novel *THE TERRITORY*. The book appeared in the year of the author's untimely death, when his heart gave up under the strain of the strenuous regime he had set it.

Oleg Kuvayev started writing early in life and even before the novel appeared, literary scholars and critics knew of the romantically minded geologist working in the Far North who in the intervals between prospecting expeditions had found time to write and publish nearly a dozen slim volumes on polar subjects. But it was *THE TERRITORY* that revealed his true potential as an artist.

What "territory" is the novel about? Physically, it is the rugged Chukotka Peninsula, the extreme north-eastern tip of the Soviet Union, far from the centres of modern civilisation, but it is also a place

where the dedicated and the daring can reveal the great qualities they possess to the full.

The plot of the novel is connected with prospecting for commercial gold deposits, but this is only the outer layer. Underneath there is a search for and discovery of something infinitely more precious: strength of mind and will, the beauty of the human spirit.

The head of the Territory administration, the gifted geologist Chinkov who is also a grandmaster in the kind of chess that administration involves, feels and knows with all his amazing intuition that there is fabulous wealth still hidden in "his domain". But intuition alone is not enough. There has to be proof, and as soon as possible, because by decision of higher authorities the area is due to be closed for further surveying as unpromising. His experienced eye picks out a young prospector, Sergei Baklakov, who is literally seething with untapped reserves of energy, and directs this energy, this desire to achieve something, towards a truly great goal. The enormous responsibility placed on the young man's shoulders—his evidence will decide the fate of a region the size of Europe—drives him on to accomplish something that he could never have accomplished without such an aim.

Oleg Kuvayev's novel in praise of the fine qualities people are capable of showing when faced with real difficulties deserves a wide readership.

The Territory

(An excerpt)

A big mountain hare sprang madly from behind a rock, darted uphill and froze against the backdrop of the pale sky. The hare looked almost blue. You could see the wind flicking the fur on its back and the quivering of its long ears. Sergei Baklakov swore mildly to himself, "Oh, shivering shitbags!" Now, in his second day, he regretted that instead of a rifle he had taken a pistol, the idiot's weapon, and even that with its strap, holster and pack of stubby little cartridges was lying at the bottom of his rucksack. He bent down and in one quick movement skated a stone at the hare. It did gymnastics with its ears and vanished, melted into the evening air.

Baklakov reached the top of the pass. The mountain mass broke away steeply and below lay the yellow tundra splashed with the luminous patches of its lakes. Far away on the horizon hang a long black band, slit by blades of water. This was the legendary River Vatap, bordering the wild Ketung uplands. Baklakov looked back. The River Elgai, where their camp was, had disappeared in a maze of black and violet mountains.

Mongolov had ordered him to take a sleeping bag, a pistol and three tins of condensed milk in case of emergency. Baklakov had said yes, he would. He had taken the pistol and tucked the sleeping bag away under his bed so that it wouldn't bother Mongolov's eyesight. He hated condensed milk so he had thrown it away. Speed and attack—that was the key to this trip. You could never work up any speed with a great load on your back. Admittedly, the Vikings used to make their raids with a full load, weapons and wearing heavy sea-boots. But to hell with the Vikings. All they had to do was raid, plunder and get away. His goal was to carry out the task set by Chinkov.

Baklakov chose a sheltered spot among the rocks, heaved off his rucksack and quickly made a fire with solid alcohol tablets on a flat stone. Instead of a mess tin he carried an old tin-can that had once contained peaches. There was a puddle close by. While the water was boiling Baklakov got out his route map. It was an old map, but an honest one. What the Severstroi topographers didn't know they had not put down,

and what they were doubtful about, they had recorded with dotted lines.

The clouds parted. The tundra gleamed a bright yellow with the blue line of the Ketung Uplands painted in like a scene from a cartoon. The ice cap of a mountain where no man had ever set foot shone, abnegated and pure above the distant blue mist. "Oh, my God!" Baklakov gasped aloud as happiness rushed up inside him.

He was sitting with his back against a rock: a touselled head planted on a long-armed, long-legged body, the rough-hewn face of a native of the Vyatka forests, and the energy-saving posture that came from a life without chairs, a life spent in constant motion.

Evening was approaching. Baklakov felt it from the intense stillness, from the barely perceptible changes in the light. From an inside pocket he pulled out a pouch of strong tobacco and a pipe with charred and chipped bowl. He lit it and enveloped himself in the sweetish smoke, enjoying that special kind of comfort that the wanderer creates for himself wherever he goes. He sat smoking, his wadded jacket unbuttoned, his legs in their tattered canvas trousers stretched out. His bearded, biblical face was tranquil, his heart clocking a steady sixty beats a minute, his blood, still unpolluted with nicotine, alcohol and infection, pumping with a similar steady power through his veins. A wonderful country of yellow tundra, dark mountains and pallid sky! The wonderful solitude of the pathfinder amid as yet unexplored mountains and valleys! And how wonderful to know that you would never die!

Baklakov never doubted for a moment that he was completely and absolutely immortal. In addition to which he also knew that behind him he had the Old Man of the Woods, the bog god, who could be counted on in time of need. Baklakov was contented because he was alone with himself, which meant that he was what he was, his real self.

As an eighteen-year-old bumpkin, a cartoonist's Lomonosov in a cotton jacket and canvas-topped boots, he had come from a remote forest township straight into the Moscow Geological Prospecting Institute. The hereditary cunning of the Vyatka carpenters had helped him to choose the right line of behaviour. He had kept quiet about the gold medal he had won at school. He had been the first to laugh at his

clod-hopping boots, the first to sit down and peel potatoes at the hostel, and he had never stuck his neck out at meetings. Just an easy-going country bumpkin, ready to carry the can for the whole course—that was Sergei Baklakov. Why had he chosen the geological prospecting institute? Could I ever get into the Moscow Aviation Institute with a mug like mine? Why had he joined the ski club? We're used to skiing down our way. My feet itch when I haven't got skis on. In about his third year everyone grasped the fact that Baklakov was unbelievably lucky. He was getting an extra grant? Well, that was only because the professors liked the painstaking, country types. Out of long habit they still cherished the idea that a geologist should be a cross between a pack animal and a human being. How had he passed the Master of Sport standard for ski racing? Well, the boys said he was the only one who had guessed the right kind of wax to use for the Moscow cross-country championship; nobody else had. These daft fellows often were lucky. But few would have guessed that by his sixth year bumpkin Sergei Baklakov would have got more out of the institute than any of them. Word-perfect in his science, honours diploma with a distinction, iron constitution, tempered by six years of ski racing, and an appointment to the remote and unknown Severstroi, with its promise of unmapped regions and unlimited opportunities for career, achievement and so on. When they realised this it was too late. And no one ever did realise that Baklakov had come to the institute brimming with ambition and faith in the idea that the Vyatka name "Baklakov" would find a place for itself on the map of the USSR. This was what the forgotten and wrinkled old god of the bogs had whispered to him. And he had also whispered that Chinkov's task was the beginning of work in earnest. The first thing was to prove modestly and without any fuss that you could do everything.

Baklakov repacked his rucksack quickly. There had been a change in the air. To the left, over the upper reaches of the Vatap a huge and totally black storm cloud had appeared. It was much too still all around. The hum of the mosquitoes had also changed. It had a different tonality. He must get to that river quick. There was nothing worse than not knowing what lay in front of you. Don't think, get on with it—that was the man's way of tackling a job.

On the lower slopes, when he got in among the tussocks,

Baklakov began to sing Chaliapin's famous song "If 'twere only forever..." in a husky voice, that was nothing like Chaliapin's.

By nightfall, utterly exhausted, he had made seven kilometres from the mountains behind him. Their summit was bathed in a threatening red radiance. He spent a long time scouring the hollow for dry twigs of the polar birch. Then he unpacked his rucksack and took out the tent. "Shivering shitbags," he muttered resignedly when he had finished the work. He had got used to talking to himself way back, at the students' hostel. After a quick drink of hot tea, he put out the little camp-fire, lifted the flap of the tent, pushed his rucksack and jacket inside and crawled in after them, letting down the flap behind him. The tent was too low for sitting, so he pulled off his boots lying down and put on dry woollen socks, wrapped his knees in his footcloths, and buttoned his jacket round him, leaving the sleeves free. He wouldn't freeze even if the night was cold. It was light in the tent and the setting sun cast a sombre glow on its contents. The mosquitoes clung indifferently to the ceiling. Something was happening outside and Baklakov could not understand what. It was worrying. A polar fox barked in the distance. A bird flew noisily overhead. With a wry grin Baklakov put his hand out from under his jacket and unbuttoned the pistol holster. "Go to sleep," he told himself. "Don't think, get on with it, that's the truth. The more you think, the more you worry."

There was a gust of wind, the tent roof flapped, sparks flared and died before his eyes, and he was dreaming. He dreamed he was on a trek in some southern country. He was wearing only swimming trunks and carrying his samples in a string bag. He was walking along the bank of a very wide black river, looking for a crossing. He was firmly aware that from now on his life would be divided—one half before the crossing, the other half after it. It was like the Rubicon they had read about at school and the Caesar who was about to cross it. "What the hell," he said. "It's not a black river, it's a grey one. This is a different river." And he woke up.

He could not make out what the time was. Before his eyes there was nothing but grey. Then he saw that the tent had sagged almost to the level of his face and realised that it was the cold that had woken him. Unbelievably he poked his head out of the tent and found that the tundra all round had been

casually sprinkled with a thin bluish layer of snow. Prophecy fulfilled! Something was falling from the sky, either rain or granular snow. With a premonition of disaster Baklakov dressed quickly and crawled out of the tent.

...By the time he reached the river the snow had stopped and a cold green band had appeared in the sky over the Ketung uplands. The muffled threatening roar of the Vatap was close by but Baklakov could not see it. Before him there was a wall of wet scrub with damply drooping leaves. The snow was about ten centimetres deep. He lighted a fire and drank a full tin of very strong tea, then another. Then he lighted his pipe and said to himself, "Life is once again wonderful and surprising."

Baklakov went along the scrub downstream and came out on to a small tundra clearing, from which a shoal cut diagonally across the river. Here and there rocks stuck out, black and shining. The water looked passive, indifferent, almost black against the snow-covered bank. A little farther downstream the bank became a peaty cliff. The cliff had been hollowed out and the water swirled under it with a satisfied gut gurgle. The other end of the shoal was lost in the grey murk above the grey water.

Baklakov was a poor swimmer, a fact that he had concealed from both Mongolov and Chinkov.

"And you were afraid of a little thing like this!" Baklakov said loudly, to cheer himself up. But for some reason his voice sounded flat and the river, resenting the intrusion, threw the words back at him.

"Here I come then!" Baklakov shouted stubbornly. He started pulling off his clothes. Don't think, get on with it. He tucked his trousers and boots under the flap of his rucksack, put the box of matches under his knitted ski cap, and wrapped his log-book in footcloths; it wouldn't get wet there even if it went under the water. He kept his jacket on.

The water tightened round his ankles like the laces of a mountain ski boot. The pebbles on the bottom were slippery but his feet soon grew numb and he hobbled along feeling for rocks and hollows with wooden legs. The water came up to his knees, then his thighs. It'll knock me over in a minute, he thought resignedly. The green band over the Ketung uplands spread out and a lonely sunbeam pointed down from above like a warning finger. Leaning against the current, Baklakov

waded on and on across this endless shoal. His knees and legs did not ache any more; they seemed to be wrapped in clinging, chilly cotton wool. When the water dropped to his knees again he began to run, lifting his feet high. He ran out on to a narrow bar of sand beyond the shoal and plunged straight into the bushes. Plastered with narrow willow leaves, he burst into a small clearing patched with snow. There was a hare sitting in the clearing, looking at him. "Hullo, chum," he said as he ran past. The hare did not even jump aside. A curious, unfrightened inhabitant of the River Vatap, it took a few hops in his wake. Baklakov pushed on through the bushes, and came to a stunned halt. Before him stretched a powerful, rolling river circled with eddying cross-currents. The water rushed by and at the same time seemed to be stationary, as though locked in some moment of the past. It had a dull glint. For a second Baklakov felt lost. Amid these hundreds of deserted kilometres. Tundra hills. River islands. Dark fells. Under a low-hanging sky. Alone.

During the night there was a heavy snowfall. It came down in big damp flakes and the top of the tent sagged lower and lower. The ground was wet and Baklakov began to shiver violently. If he had brought a sleeping bag he could have got into it and slept for several days without using up his food supplies. If he had brought a rifle, he could have sat by a fire and roasted deer steaks or one of the hares that he had seen plenty of.

The top of the tent sagged lower and lower and suddenly it struck him that wet calico was almost airtight. Even if he had been a first-class swimmer, this water would still have been a problem. But perhaps the tent would help. The sense of urgency grew. There was no other way, so why put it off?

It was still snowing heavily. All was quiet, even the sound of the water was muffled. He rolled up the tent, pulled the cord out of his rucksack and tied the roll tight at both ends. Without taking off his clothes he forded a shoal. His boots became very heavy. At the next channel he soaked the tent carefully, until his hands grew numb with cold. Then he tossed it into the air like a fishing net and bunched the bottom in his fist. The result was a large white bladder. He stepped into water and rested his cheek on the damp bladder, gripping the bottom of the tent in one hand and paddling with the other. He heard the air hissing out through the wet cloth, felt

the bladder gradually weakening and growing smaller under his cheek, felt the icy water clawing at his chest. The bank disappeared. Silent whirlpools eddied round him. But he felt no fear.

The tent gradually became deflated. Baklakov shifted his grip higher and paddled faster. But all of a sudden the tent went quite flat and his head dipped under water. Baklakov gripped it in his teeth and started paddling with both hands, but the white fabric wrapped itself round him, imprisoning his arms. He let go with his teeth and the tent dragged him down, its guy-lines lashing round his boots. The current carried him downstream silently and very fast, as if in a dream. He dived to free his legs and his hat was carried away. The hempen guy-lines held his legs fast. But just then the old, wrinkled god of the woods popped up beside him. "You have a knife," said the god. "Don't worry, you have a knife." Baklakov dived again and pushed the knife between his bound legs. He was free in an instant. "Take off your rucksack," the god commanded him. "Don't be afraid." The tent was billowing nearby. Baklakov paddled again like a dog. His left hand was gripping the knife like grim death. There was still some air in his jacket and it was easy to swim. Something dark showed up on the water ahead. A bush caught on a sand bar, Baklakov told himself. He snatched a guy-line of the tent floating beside him, slipped it through the strap of the rucksack, let himself sink, then pushed off from the bottom and plunged forward, sank again and once again pushed forward.

He climbed the bar, dragging the tent and rucksack after him. His jacket and trousers seemed unbelievably heavy. He had come out on an island and there was another channel ahead but the Mordvinian god was beside him and he plunged unhesitatingly into the water.

The snow came down harder and Baklakov was afraid of losing his sense of direction. He pulled the compass out of his pocket, but it was waterlogged and the needle was sticking to the glass. Towing the tent, he crossed channel after channel, island after island. There seemed to be no end to them.

But as soon as he reached the main bank he recognised it. "Well, this is it, Comrade Chinkov! Shivering shitbags!" Baklakov said aloud. It was still snowing. He squeezed out his jacket and footcloths. Judging by its weight, the rucksack

had hardly leaked at all. He had better not touch it just yet. The film was canistered, the camera and log-book well wrapped up. He still had one wax-coated box of matches—his iron ration—in his breast pocket. He mustn't touch them yet. Fifty matches were fifty campfires in dry weather. He had a knife, there was cotton wool in his padded jacket and flints could be found. The food, all except the sugar, would dry out eventually.

Baklakov put on his boots and jacket and ran. The bank was level for some distance, sprinkled with snow and beside it the water looked as black as a deep well. He ran for a very long time until he came to another stretch of black water amid the white snow of the bank. This was a tributary of the Vatap and he would have to follow it upstream, into the Ketung uplands. "This is it, Comrade Chinkov," he kept repeating as he ran. He knew he must run until it stopped snowing. When the snow stopped he would find fuel for a fire and life would once again be wonderful and surprising. "This is it, Comrade Chinkov."

He walked all night, sensing the way like a wild animal. At some early hour in the morning the river became quite narrow, the water disappeared and Sergei, slipping and falling, stumbled along over a scree of snow-covered boulders—forward and up, forward and up. Once, through the snow-storm, he heard a clatter of hooves and the heavy breathing of what must have been a big reindeer in flight. Then a hot lump formed in his stomach, rose to his chest, then to his head and blotted out everything. Several times he barked his knees on the sharp boulders, but felt no pain. When the hot lump went away, he noticed that the snow had stopped and there was a strip of blue sky above the mountains and that he was climbing the shoulder of a fell, along a sheep track, over deeply metamorphosed slate. "Well, Sergei," he told himself. "This is it. We've arrived." The granite massif, the first of the three on his route, was close by. Baklakov felt it. He had entered the zone of contact. "Shivering shitbags, I've made it!" he whispered to himself. But he felt no joy. He wanted to lie down. In a narrow sheltered valley he pitched his tent somehow. Another black cloud was creeping silently and inexorably up from the southern uplands. "I'll lie down for a bit, then get to work," he muttered. "I'll have a bit of rest, then go on. I want a rest." Without undressing he lay down

on the wet calico floor of the tent, tucked his hands between his knees, and rested his head on his wet rucksack. It came into uncomfortable contact with the jutting butt of the pistol. He shifted his head and fell into bottomless depths. When he opened his eyes again he heard the rustle of snow on the tent. The top was sagging, and when his cheek touched it, he felt as if it had been seered with hot iron.

Baklakov forced himself to push his head out of the tent. The rocks all round were shrouded with dead blue snow. Once again there was a hare sitting near the tent, observing him with curiosity. He was being pursued by hares. Or perhaps this was delirium?

"Stay there!" Baklakov commanded and reached for the pistol. The rucksack would not come undone. He cut the cord with his knife, took out the pistol and sent a cartridge into the breech. The hare was still in the same position. Sergei lifted the pistol in both hands and took long and careful aim. The barrel kept jumping about a metre away from the hare on either side. The hare sat motionless and its slanting witchlike eyes glittered frighteningly. Baklakov bit his lip, steadied the barrel and pressed the trigger. There was a deafening report and the smoking cartridge fell beside him. The hare was writhing on the snow, kicking its long legs. "You're wrong, Comrade Chinkov." He picked up the hare by its soft warm ears and carried it into the tent. Somehow he skinned it with his long knife and started eating the warm limps of flesh, trying to chew them as thoroughly as possible.

He ate the whole hindquarters of the hare, threw the furred and bloody remains out of the tent, and lay down again, pulling his knees up to his chin. He was not cold but he had to climb a steep, crumbling sandy slope. The sand crumbled away and he found himself at the bottom and had to start again. The sand was a grey leaden colour. "My time is yet to come, Comrade Chinkov," he whispered, fighting his way up the grey slope. "You don't know us, Vyatka people. If we want to get somewhere, we'll get there, we'll bore our way in, shoulder the door down, creep in on tiptoe, pretend to be simpletons. We, Vyatka folk, are all like that."

An old man by the name of Kyaye was sitting on a snow-capped hillock in the tundra in a strange posture, with

his legs held close together and at right angles to his body. A European could not have endured such a posture for five minutes, but Kyaye experienced no discomfort; he had been accustomed to sitting like this from childhood. Among his people this was considered the best posture for resting the back and the legs. The snow falling on his shoulders and bare head did not worry him. Far from it, it reminded him that winter was near—the best time for the reindeer herdsman. At the thought of winter Kyaye shrugged his shoulders and his arms slipped out of their broad sleeves into the fur shirt. He felt warm and cosy. His nostrils drew in the cold damp air. The smell of smoke had gone—the snow must have put out the surface fire. Only the peat bogs were still burning. It would take long and heavy rain to put them out. And after that the reindeer would sink into them and break their legs. And after that they would be covered with ice.

The herd was lying quiet. Since the first snow, relieved of the heat and mosquitoes, the reindeer had been grazing almost night and day. He had driven them here specially, to this untrampled but small pasture. There was enough pasture here to last a week, until a new lot of mosquitoes was born. Kyaye chuckled with satisfaction at the thought. In his old age he had become almost infallible at predicting the weather. And now he had been able to choose just the right place for the herd. It was quiet and gaining weight. And he, too, felt calm and was not wasting his strength sitting on this hillock. Once again he had cheated old age.

Kyaye was thinking about Time. Whenever he thought of the chain of years he had lived, of the days when he had not existed, but his father had already been alive, and of the even earlier time when his father had not existed, but there had been his people on earth, he always pictured to himself a chain of hills in the tundra. The hills in Kyaye's analogy were the events of which Time was made. Without events there could be no Time—that Kyaye knew for certain. Even if one imagined something as distant as the whisper of a dead man, there had been events then, so there must have been Time. The tundra was made up of hills. The tundra could be compared with life, with its boundless expanses.

Such was the scheme of life, space and time devised by herdsman Kyaye and he found it quite adequate for his needs. Some hills overshadow others and the distant hills cannot be

seen behind the near ones. And it was exactly the same with events. Between the hills there were lowlands hidden from every side, and the most distant hills melted into the air, just as a distant memory weakens and fades away.

The land where Kyaye was born and had grown old had always been remote from the history taught at school. The influence of the ancient oriental cultures had never reached these parts. European or, as it was sometimes called, Christian civilisation, learned about the Territory later than it did about the peoples of the south seas. The teachings of Buddha and Islam that had swept across the countries of the East had bypassed the Territory. The missionaries had never come this far. Perhaps the cold and the wild reputation of the Territory frightened them more than the heat and the arrows of the natives of the tropical countries, or perhaps the land here had been written off as barren and uninhabitable and therefore of no use to the church.

Nevertheless Kyaye's ancestors had lived here for thousands of years. According to one version of history, the waves of migration taking place at some time between the Stone and Bronze Ages had tossed a group of roaming hunters into these far northern parts and rolled back again, leaving them on the shores of the ice-covered ocean, among the snow-covered hills. They had called themselves "people" or rather "real people". Their clothes, their food, their customs were all soaked in a great rationality. It was the rationality of the herbs and lichen that had survived on the frozen soils and rocks of the Territory. The great power of survival of Kyaye's tribe was expressed in a refreshing humour and carefree attitude to life. Without humour Kyaye's ancestors would quickly have become madmen. A nation of madmen cannot exist, so their carefree attitude was perfectly rational.

...Something exploded alarmingly among the herd. The reindeer backs stirred, the old stag broke away to one side and began to run. His body bounced along smoothly and steadily and only his heavy crown of antlers displayed his majestic presence. Then, just as unexpectedly, the stag halted and walked back to the herd.

Kyaye pushed his arm through the slit in his *kukhlyanka* and reached out for a massive old pipe.

...Kyaye had noticed the approach of old age not in the

mirror but by the feeling of weariness that came upon him more and more often. His life demanded constant physical effort: running, walking, throwing a lasso, chasing the reindeer, sometimes shooting. For many years now he had watched the world with a slightly mocking smile and cheated old age by economising on movement. He knew where the reindeer would run and guessed the approach routes taken by prowling wolves. He sensed changes in the weather so that he could save his strength by getting away from blizzards. Kyaye regarded himself as much more in the past than in the future. It was said that when a man died he went to another tundra, but he didn't really believe that, although he would not have minded living his life over again. Kyaye had learned from childhood that wisdom without movement was of no use to one's neighbour and was therefore a burden to the people. This was a very old truth. At the thought of death Kyaye inhaled the tobacco smoke deep into his lungs—smoking was, after all, a pleasant pastime. He coughed and just at that moment he thought he heard a shot. He could not say for sure, but a vague sense of alarm brought him to his feet and he headed for the *yaranga*. The reindeer were bunched together. In his soft herdsman's fur-boots Kyaye ran quickly up the slope. Smoke was still rising from the *yaranga*, so his granddaughter must still be there; she had not gone out. Nevertheless he tugged at the sling of the long Winchester rifle on his shoulder as he headed for the *yaranga*, mechanically avoiding the trail he himself had left in the snow that morning.

His granddaughter was called Tamara. This year she would be entering the tenth class at school and perhaps this would be her last summer in the tundra. Not many young people came back after finishing school.

"Heh!" the old man called out as he approached the *yaranga*. No one answered. Over the fire of polar birch branches there hung an old copper pot—an object of great pride in the old man's eyes. The pot was the same age as himself. He glanced under the flap. Tamara was darning his favourite deerskin trousers. In winter there would be no one to mend them. She was sitting half naked, in accordance with the ancient custom of the women of their tribe, except that instead of a deerskin she was wearing sports shorts. The old man looked with pleasure at his granddaughter's firm young

body, her already mature and broad thighs, and the impudently prominent breast of a future mother. Perhaps he would live to see her son. Kyaye was pleased that his granddaughter observed the ancient custom and allowed her body to breathe. At any rate, when there were no young herdsman in the *yaranga*. Tamara slipped out of the flap, took the pot off the fire and replaced it with a kettle. She moved as silently and swiftly as an ermine. And her whole figure was as smooth and streamlined as an ermine's.

Squatting on his haunches by the wall of the *yaranga*, the old man kept his eyes fixed on his granddaughter. The naked body was normal to their way of life. It was rational and healthy. Tamara's body was brown, the shorts white, she was wearing red gym shoes and her hair was black and glossy as the morning water in the turf lakes. How beautiful! He asked, "Did you hear a shot?"

"No, there was no shot. I would have heard it."

"It must be so," Kyaye agreed.

He drunk a mug of brick-tea and hurried back to the herd. There had been no shot. Tamara was a real girl of the tribe of real people. She could hear the rustle of a mouse under the snow.

Kyaye had a herdsman's walk—he rolled from side to side, as though limping on both legs. It was a walk developed by running over tussocks. That shot must have come from beyond the distant hills of Time. Perhaps it had first sounded five or ten years ago, and had now returned. That was probably it. Or perhaps it had come from the future. Kyaye believed that nothing in the mountains or the tundra ever happened without some purpose. So a mark was left in his memory—the shot that he had imagined.

The reindeer were still lying. Soon they would start roaming in search of reindeer moss and he would have no time to sit about. He took out his pipe again and filled it with the coarse tobacco, which they sold in the shop by weight, like sugar or macaroni.

Again he had that feeling of warmth, and closed his eyes. He recalled his granddaughter's swift movements, her gliding walk and suddenly it occurred to him that to see such a thing was happiness—if you had outlived love of possessions, of power, of yourself. At the thought of happiness Kyaye returned once more to his thoughts about Time. Not

everything was quite right, especially in this comparison of events with hills. One could climb the same hill any number of times and every year his nomadic route took him across the same hills. But events did not repeat themselves. So life was perhaps more like a long route march, each time to a new locality. This journey began in the unknown and ended in the unknown. There was no looking beyond its limits. Then why did he often have the feeling that all this had happened to him before? Perhaps he had got lost in his old age and was going over the same ground again? But, then, where were the people he had been with the first time he crossed it? And suddenly, by some strange coincidence of ideas, Kyaye realised that the shot had not been the work of his imagination. It had happened.

...Sergei Baklakov was still climbing out of the sand pit, falling back again and climbing again, and yet he was still lying with his hands tucked between his knees. From time to time he felt that his body was swelling, stretching and becoming so huge that he could not understand how he managed to fit into this cramped little tent. Then he would again lose consciousness and start climbing the slope. Delirium and reality were mingled and now he was in reality lying at the bottom of a pit and staring at the grey sand, squinting at it from the corner of his eye. "This is delirium," he thought, "there could never be sand like this. I am very ill. I must get up and walk. Don't think, act."

...This time he was awakened by the sound of footsteps. They broke through the monotonous patter of the rain, to which he had grown accustomed and was not listening. The tent trembled and cold drops of water fell on his cheek. "The pistol," he thought, "where did I drop it?" But he felt too lazy to get up and closed his eyes. The footsteps crunched again. Evidently someone was looking for the entrance.

"Let him look," Baklakov thought, and actually smiled.

"Is anyone alive here?" a voice asked.

Baklakov tried to answer but could only wheeze hoarsely, a sound that genuinely surprised him.

"Eeeh!" the voice came again softly.

Sergei got up on all fours and at once his head hit the sagging wet calico. "I've touched the ceiling, now it'll leak,"

he thought listlessly and tried to bend back the flap and crawl out. But the calico had stuck to the tent pole. So with an effort he stood up with the tent draped over him and at that moment noticed the pistol at his feet, already coated with rust. All he could see was the little patch of ground round his boots and the rusty pistol, a trophy of the Second World War. Eventually he disentangled himself from the wet and clinging tenting and the day light dazzled him. When he recovered, he saw an old, dark-faced man dressed in furs. In comparison with his own swollen and unmanageable body the old man's appeared tiny and almost weightless. A mere puff would blow it away.

"Hullo," Baklakov pronounced hoarsely.

"Hullo," the old man responded.

"I think I'm ill," Baklakov croaked. "I'm a geologist."

"A geologist—that is good," the old man exclaimed joyfully and seemed to sigh with relief. "I am a herdsman. We know you are ill."

"How!"

"We heard a shot... So we look and there is a tent. We hide and watch. Man not appear morning, not appear evening. Sure he must be ill."

"Is your herd far away?"

"Over there," the old man nodded into the whiteness, beyond the black gleaming rocks. "Can you walk that far?"

Baklakov felt his head spinning. He sat down on the tent and his mouth twisted.

"If you stay alone, you die. Sure you die," the herdsman said. "Come with me to the *yaranga*. My name is Kyaye. Team-leader Kyaye."

Still sitting, Baklakov buttoned up his damp jacket, buckled his belt, pushed the pistol into its holster, rolled up the tent and tucked it under the flap of the rucksack, which he still had not untied since making camp. Kyaye stooped to pick up the rucksack but Sergei grabbed the straps.

"I'll find it easier with a load," he croaked.

He stood up, but staggered sideways and had to clutch the sleeve of the herdsman's wet *kukhlyanka*. An intense aching pain arose in his chest, then broke through into his back. But he felt the firm weight of the rucksack and this gave him strength.

"Straight on and straight ahead," he wheezed jokingly, and

set off into the rainy murk in the direction that Kyaye had indicated.

It seemed to Baklakov only a short walk, although it actually took nearly an hour and a half. In the end they crossed a small very clear stream—the water was pleasantly cool on his burning feet. On a hillock ahead Baklakov saw the dark cone of the *yaranga* and the smoke. Later he remembered himself under a low canopy of fur. Kyaye was offering him a box of medicines and saying something about a doctor. Baklakov realised there were lots of medicines, but Kyaye did not know which he needed.

“How should I know?” Sergei said in surprise. He explained volubly that he had never been ill in his life and could not possibly get ill, and this was just an accident. He must have got ill instead of someone else.

He kept on explaining this, but Tamara crawled under the canopy, pulled off his wet canvas boots and shirt and, having stripped him naked, dressed him in light trousers and a shirt made of the skin of a young deer. Then, during his next fit of laughter, she popped two tablets into his mouth: norsulfazol and aspirin. Sergei Baklakov grew quiet.

His delirium changed. Now he imagined that the god of the bogs that he had known since childhood had come to the tent. The god's eyes were almost hidden between folds of skin. Usually they were a faded blue, like those of the old women of Vyatka. They understood everything. Sometimes they flashed with a bog green, and then Baklakov felt as frightened as he had been in childhood. But this was his god, an old man he knew through and through, and he did not try to run away.

When Baklakov opened his eyes it was as if he had come out of a dark, empty room. He saw that he was dressed in deerskin trousers and shirt. There was a skin under him and skins on all sides. The feeling of cosiness merged with another blissful feeling, of recovery. He sat up. The edge of the flap had been turned back. From outside came a faint sound of slapping. He put his head out from under the flap and through the doorway gained a view of the tundra bathed in yellow light. To the right of the entrance a girl was squatting. She was wearing sports trousers but no shirt. Baklakov saw her brown shoulder and one sharp breast with a small dark nipple and the outline of her dark flushed cheek and ear, half hidden by a long strand of straight hair.

The girl was kneading dough. She rolled it into a firm ball, broke off a piece, flattened it and made a hollow in it with her thumb. She felt Baklakov's glance upon her and turned slowly. They looked into each other's eyes for a few moments. The girl parted her lips, so dark that they appeared to be congealed, smiled and, turning her back on him, picked up the shirt lying beside her. With a kind of feeble astonishment he stared at the slim back widening suddenly at the thighs, at the slightly protruding spine and the defenceless neck. Then he remembered where he was and ducked back under the canopy.

...Kyaye slowly transferred his glance from Tamara to Baklakov and then back to Tamara. The old man's eyes were like two dark knots in an old wind-blown tree. Tamara was boiling dumplings in seal blubber. The boiling fat filled the tent with the smell of burnt fish. The cooked dumplings rose in a golden pile. Kyaye pulled a leather bag out of a corner, took out a bunch of half-pressed stems of tobacco and shredded them on a board. He filled a pipe and smoked it, then from the same bag took out a packet of makhorka and made himself a cigarette. And when he had smoked that, Kyaye produced from the same sack an already opened packet of Belomor cigarettes with cardboard holders and pressed one carefully between his fingers. Baklakov could not help laughing.

"If you smoke the long one straight away, it leaves a not pleasant taste," Kyaye explained.

The seal blubber bubbled in the copper pot, the pile of dumplings grew, and Tamara moved about swiftly and silently. A bit of tundra was visible through the open door of the *yaranga*.

"Now I shall kill a reindeer," Kyaye said aloud to himself. "I will feed you. In the morning you shall eat, in the afternoon you shall eat, in the evening and at night you shall eat. And as soon as you feel your strength return you shall go."

"Yes," Baklakov said. "Of course, I must."

Kyaye himself stewed the meat according to an ancient nomad recipe. The raw flesh, cut into thin strips, was put into cold, unsalted water and taken out as soon as the water boiled.

Baklakov ate. He dug his teeth into the ribs, ripped the

flesh off them and swallowed down the long thin strips almost without chewing. The juice trickled down his chin and hands, the *yaranga* reeked of steaming broth, meat and bone marrow.

When Kyaye went out to the herd to spend the night, he took his granddaughter with him, and Baklakov was left alone. He sat over the embers of the fire, listened to the sounds of the nocturnal tundra, ate reindeer meat and drank tea. He would fall asleep for short spells, as though dropping into a dark pit. Several times in the night he was awakened by hunger and ate again. He drank broth straight from the pot and his beard, hands and face were soon smudged with sticky black soot. All the time a small deer-chasing Eskimo dog called Umichka lay by the wall of the tent gnawing the bones. Whenever he awoke, Baklakov would encounter her almost human glance. The dog's eyes were of different colours, one brown, the other blue.

...Many years later Baklakov came to the conclusion that his true manhood dated from the time he had spent in Kyaye's *yaranga*. Life before he fell ill had been mere homework, like a primitive essay written in a school exercise-book. Those vague dreams he had entertained lying on the sandy bank of the stream that flowed past their forest station, the clowning he had affected during his college years, the sweat of his sports training, and the belief that geology was the only worthwhile profession on earth. Even his meeting with Chinkov and the foolhardiness of his crossing of the Vatap—the Grey Water. All that had been on one plane and in black-and-white. Later he would often recall Kyaye's deeply wrinkled face that had never known soap, the girl's naked back, and that glance over the shoulder, as deep as a test-hole, and along with all this the blissful feeling of recovery. Life acquired volume, smell, colour and lost the straightforwardness of firm decisions. Baklakov remembered forever the smell of skins and fish oil and lost forever his bogland god. The old man of the forests never returned to him again...

...Many years later, in the days of Baklakov's renown, an author with a commission to write a feature about him for one of the big dailies arrived from the capital. The author visited the herdsman. In Baklakov's office he talked at length about how he had tried on a *kukhlyanka*, eaten raw flesh, seen the herdsman currying the skins with urine—and as a well

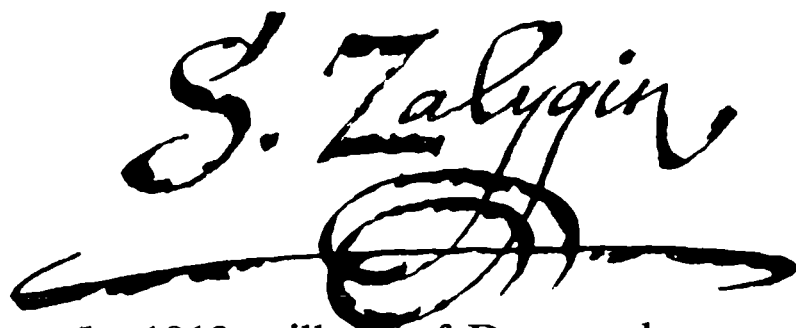
cared-for individual demonstrated his distaste with such condescending sympathy that Baklakov could not refrain from saying, "It would be a good thing to start an article about your books by mentioning the cut of your trousers. And an exposition of your ideas with the sort of tooth-paste you use." It took a long time to calm himself down after that. "Forget it, Sergei," he kept muttering. He was bitterly hurt on account of Kyaye and his people, whom he sincerely regarded as a great people. And he was sorry that he was only a technician and could not express the idea of the great unity of everything that lives on earth—of engineer Baklakov and the deer-chasing dog Umichka, for instance. But all that came later....

Kyaye gave him a *kukhlyanka* made of deerskin and a pair of *chizhi*—fur stockings—and showed him the ford across the River Vatap. It was just where the river emerged from the Ketung uplands.

In a short, belted *kukhlyanka*, much thinner after his illness Baklakov set off into the Ketung uplands. Yes, Comrade Chinkov, the job will be done. Sickness had somehow drained him of gravity and he felt weightless. He could walk across water if he wanted to. For some reason he kept remembering the words of Semyon Kopkov, star of the long-distance trackers, "We aren't Vikings, so don't stick your jaw out. We're Asiatics and that's where we live. The highest virtues in the tundra are patience and care. The highest stupidity is to rush. Deviate, wait, have patience. Only then will you be a true tundraman."

1975

Translated by Robert Daglish



(b. 1913, village of Durasovka,
near Ufa)

One of the most distinguished of today's Soviet writers, Sergei Zalygin started out as a land reclamation engineer, subsequently became an engineer in the hydrometeorological service in the North, was in charge of a hydrographical expedition to Siberia, and worked as a teacher and as a staff scientist. But the writer in him was also maturing on the quiet. He became a professional author at the age of about forty, and is now well known for his novels, *THE PATHWAYS OF ALTAI* (1962), *ON THE IRTYSH* (1964), *SALT RAVINE* (1967), and *THE COMMISSION* (1976). Each of these works, based on true life in Siberia, is conspicuous for wealth of human characters and the urgency with which important social problems are stated.

Zalygin's novel, *THE SOUTH-AMERICAN VERSION*, was published when he was sixty. It seems to have little in common with his earlier novels and stories, which are about peasants coping with vital

social problems. But this time, the central character is very much the contemporary woman of our own times, head of one of the laboratories in a Moscow scientific research institute. In the earlier books, there were conflicts of social passions; but here we have a spectacular love affair. There seems to be nothing in common indeed. And yet there is something: it is in Sergei Zalygin's striving always to solve socially important problems in the very broadest possible historical context.

The South-American Version

(An excerpt)

Mind you, Irina Victorovna had greatly feared and was very unwilling to meet a person like that. Precisely this sort of man. It would have been more than easy to avoid meeting him if he were not there to meet. It would have been more than easy to drag on until she was forty-five, the age she had set for herself as a limit after which, she thought, there could be nothing more, no dangerous encounters.

To drag on until she was forty-five with Mansurov-Kurilsky there, or, if you are after variety—let it be Kurilsky-Mansurov—and that would be all, that would mean it was the way it should be, such was her fate. Everything was as clear as day and nothing depended on you.

But the trouble was that she suspected this person to exist...

What a name—Vassili Nikandrovich! Something solemn, something of the people, of nature, not invented but real. Vassili Nikandrovich Nikandrov—whether you like it or not.

Vassili Nikandrovich headed the largest, one might even say the leading, department at their institute, the fifth; his being in charge of a department, his high position and prestige and all the rest that went with it might have repelled Irina Victorovna and made her wary, it might have once and for all determined her attitude to him as an attitude respectful to the utmost, good-neighbourly and even friendly but at the same time quite, quite official.

But the official part was not there, although nothing else seemed to have taken its place—nothing like, say, a special feeling of sympathy, of curiosity or a sense of estrangement. Which meant there was a vacuum, some kind of uncertainty and ambiguity.

Actually this, too, is not exactly how it was, in reality neither she nor perhaps any other woman at the institute could define her attitude to Nikandrov. One thing was clear to everyone—falling in love with Vassili Nikandrovich in earnest would have been terribly trivial and terribly foolish. Besides, it was almost tantamount to suicide.

That was why one could have easily said: “Oh, Vassili Nikandrovich, I’ve been in love with you for the last ten years. Haven’t you noticed?” And he could have answered in

the same vein: "Sure I did. Nine years ago—I did." After this you had to get offended, gravely offended. But what for?

He was a dear, that he was.

He was awfully clever and therefore engrossed in his scientific problems, but there are scores of clever guys around—he was, however, of a special kind. He would not forget to send, from somewhere abroad, from one of the simposiums he was forever attending, his birthday greetings to a junior researcher or a laboratory assistant working in his department.

Not only his own department but it seemed the entire institute was conscious of his endless benevolence, his readiness if not to help everyone, then at least to notice and understand each and every one.

Who would want to bind herself to such a man? In this sense may the deuce take him! Touch me not! A man who is always stared at, who has long gotten used to this, who is always in the centre of attention so you couldn't even go to the movies with him and stay unnoticed. A man about whom women, who had been around, feel it their duty to warn female novices: "Don't dare even think of it. There's nothing in it for you but a bad headache." And then, finally, this man the way he is didn't appear out of nowhere; the law of the preservation of matter is an accurate law and you should never make sport of it or trifle with it. Perfection is a doubtful quality and has to be rooted in its opposite: in secret pedantry, snobbery or egoism. You never see the whole spectrum of a man simultaneously—some part of him you see, while the other is hidden. One wonders what is hidden in Nikandrov...

Rumour had it that Vassili Nikandrovich had his own crowd of friends, also serious researchers, but working in the humanities, not at his institute. It was with them he spent his leisure: in the summer they hiked in the mountains, mostly in Kirghizia, in the winter they listened to music; he seemed to know a lot about music.

No, the whole thing just didn't fit together.

Honestly, it was all wrong!

When on New Year's Eve Irina Victorovna fell in love with someone, she had a positive feeling that she had to discover this someone. He had to be quite near or else near, but not quite, a man who existed, worked and read books...

She had to come near him, look at him and it would be almost as simple as that—one, two, three!—through instinct, through a strange illumination, she would feel, she would guess that this was a very special man, unlike anyone else. It was just that nobody knew about it, not even him. He could've died like that never finding out about himself, if it weren't for her. If it weren't for her discovery of him.

While Vassili Nikandrovich... He had no need to be discovered... On the contrary, he should rather be shielded from women's eyes...

It was all wrong, wrong!

She always imagined it that when she told her closest friend, Nyurok, about that great discovery of hers, Nyurok would be terribly amazed: "You don't mean it, Irishka! There is no such thing. It just doesn't exist. Take my word for it!"

But later, after she had had a better look, she would change her opinion: "You've got a keen eye, Irishka. Just imagine it, you've made a discovery!"

What would Nyurok say if she were to pronounce the name of Vassili Nikandrovich?

"Do you want me to sink on my knees? Or would you chop off my right arm? Come on, do it, only listen to me..."

On the other hand—as time went, her need grew that someone should discover *her*. Her own ego—Mansurova Irina Victorovna.

It could not be for nothing that she had been growing older and wiser, that she had been a mother and wife—it couldn't have been just so she would be a mother and a wife, it was also that she would be a woman. But what kind of a woman?

Everything she had experienced, everything she had come into contact with during her life—air, people, books and railroads—had contributed to creating her. But what was she like?

She hardly knew that at all. There had to be someone whose duty it was to learn it and discover her. It was his duty to her and to himself. More than that, it was his duty to the entire world which all these years, day after day, had been creating her.

Though an atheist, Irina Victorovna knew that in the Christian teaching there existed the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. She loved trying out and testing all sort of parables against herself and it turned out there was the divine

Mother and Wife in her but where was the Holy Ghost? Who was going to discover it within her?

Several years had perhaps passed since the time Irina Victorovna realised she no longer knew what she was. Mind you, she had not been sitting there with folded hands, waiting to see what would become of her. She created herself with determination and hope: out of dresses she wore in summer and winter, out of her hairdo, her voice, the expression and colour of her eyes, out of her figure, her marriage, her motherhood, her style, her work and her communion with people and the entire world around her. But what had come out of it as the result? Where was the result? Or was it all Sisyphean labour?

Obviously enough, Mansurov-Kurilsky was not the man to discover and explain all this; it would never enter his mind that there was something about her he didn't know. He loved her, he was an almost ideal husband, but he was such only for the woman she once used to be. And what about the one she was now?

When you come to think of it this way, what then?

Then Vassili Nikandrovich was the real and only thing she needed.

Also there was something remarkable about the way Irina Victorovna reacted to what she had wished for herself on the New Year's Eve: "Almighty God! Send me a Great Love. Make it a great one!"

She didn't treat this exclamation and this thought as people usually regard an exclamation, a thought or a desire, no—this for her was a fact, a true event. It had happened and it made no sense to return to it and evaluate it. To decide whether it was a good or bad event, difficult or easy, and how it might affect her life, or what was her place in this event...

It had happened no matter whether you passed judgement on it or not.

In the same way, she now recalled, she had once decided she wanted a baby. It was a very serious question, if one took into account the state of her health then. And she did give serious thought to it and decided she would have a baby. This decision was already an action, a fact and an event; it was the only, both first and last, cause of an event that followed: some time after, baby Arkashka was born and it seemed there had been no other reason for it but her inward decision.

It was the same way now—she had made another indubitable decision.

Irina Victorovna was embarrassed and even perturbed, but it was not because this decision had come to her and not because she had taken it, it wasn't that. She felt uneasy because the way it all happened—these were her exact words to herself: "The way it all happened"—was too commonplace. It happened on the New Year's Eve, neither before nor after, but at the very instant the New Year toast was proposed; besides, it all took place in the presence of Mansurov, on the whole a decent man, and Arkashka, her innocent babe, who all night long snuggled up to his mother much too trustingly. Just as if he were still a child.

If only Mansurov-Kurilsky had been unfaithful to her! But no, not him.

If at that very party at the Kanunnikovs' somebody had offered himself—she had made herself so beautiful and was so ready to accept even if not her own, then someone else's unknown fate. But no, not likely! There was no such man among the guests.

It would be different if nothing depended on her: if it were love—like a bolt out of the blue. If there was nothing she could do about it, because it was fate. But no, fate wouldn't move a finger. Fate demanded that even love should be built with her own hands, Irina Victorovna's, while fate itself stood watching, as if all this had nothing to do with her. In a way fate didn't care a straw about Mansurova Irina Victorovna, she never had and never would.

And it wouldn't be fate who would face the consequences.

"Nyurok," Irina Victorovna addressed her friend at work.
"What?"

But Irina Victorovna didn't add anything; she stood looking out of the window at the old poplar, which grew in the research institute yard.

They were both silent, and Irina Victorovna began wondering what Nyurok might be trying to guess at this moment.

Nothing, nothing at all, she told herself. Nothing had actually happened. Nothing about which anyone can have his guesses.

“Everything has happened...” she immediately corrected herself.

Of course Nyurok was expecting at least a short report on the New Year party at the Kanunnikovs’: what the guests were wearing, whether Lenchka looked nice and how did all the other guests look; what words had been uttered, worthy of mention.

Very soon Irina Victorovna began to feel exposed under the gaze Nyurok seemed to direct not at her, but past her...

Yes... It happened, she confirmed her friend’s anxious conjecture, but, please don’t press me. Not now. Later. She wanted to continue this unpronounced phrase: “...some time later,” but she didn’t have the time, for Nyurok had already dropped her eyes and the “some time later” was now hanging in mid-air, unseen and unrecognised, while “later” acquired the strength of an agreement, the strength of a promise and a necessity...

Irina Victorovna resisted it, trying to prove to herself that “later” didn’t at all mean now, or any time today, or even tomorrow, that it was in fact tantamount to “some time later”, but at this moment Vassili Nikandrovich walked into the room.

“Hi, girls,” he said ruffling his greying hair with his hand and concentrating his thoughts on the business that brought him to the information office. He stood there, in this boyish posture, tall and well-built, though slightly heavy, especially at the shoulders—he had broad peasant’s shoulders which stuck out of any suit no matter how well cut.

Sometime long ago, Irina Victorovna didn’t exactly remember when, she realised that Nikandrov was sweet on her. Very much so. Perhaps this was what is generally known as “having a thing for her”.

But though she was quite sure about it, this didn’t make things any clearer: he might have a thing for her, but what next? And was she the only one he had a thing for and was it serious or just a passing fancy? Irina Victorovna could have made a long list of people who had a thing for her, so what? Nothing at all.

“Hello, Vassili Nikandrovich! Happy New Year!” several voices answered in chorus and he felt it wasn’t quite appropriate to begin at once talking business to the friendly women, so he started by asking:

"How shall we start the day? The hair of the dog...?"

"What an idea! How can you say such a thing? If you don't feel like the hair of the dog, why should we? We're well-behaved women, the hair of the dog never enters our minds."

"Is that so?" asked Nikandrov. "Said good-bye to the old year and celebrated the coming of the new and still you don't feel fussy? Very strange. What do you think about it, Irina?" He pulled up a chair to Irina Victorovna's desk and sat quite close to her.

"If that's the way it is, you well-behaved things, then here is what I want..." and he started to explain to Irina Victorovna what it was he wanted—the fullest information possible on the latest design of the multipurpose machine tool of such and such a type.

She knew that he, as usual, was formulating the problem in clear and explicit terms and that he wouldn't come running back like crazy a day or, even an hour later, with his eyes popping out: "There's something I forgot to tell you: I need also information on..." It was still less likely that he might put on a look of surprise: "Didn't I tell you about it? Wasn't it stated clearly enough in the assignment I gave you?" Such things never happened with Nikandrov and never would, and she was aware that all the words he addressed to her, both in speaking and in written form—on the request application—all his words were explicit and meaningful—just as he was himself. But just now she couldn't understand a word he was saying... She was stunned to realise that this man had some connection to what had happened to her at the New Year party, to that fatal moment when "everything happened", and now she hated him for it, for his brazen and impertinent intrusion into her life, into everything she—Mansurova Irina Victorovna—felt she was. She nodded agreement, half averting her face, her eyes half-closed, so she wouldn't have to see him, and she thought that the most correct thing to do now would be to stand up and leave, saying she wasn't feeling well. She felt she *was* actually unwell. Nikandrov talked to her for a long time, explaining things in detail and making red pencil marks on the standard application form, emphasising that he was mostly interested in the theoretical aspect of the problem. He now underlined something else with his red pencil, stressing how important it was by the very intonation

of his voice—slightly breaking and tense—and by the expression he had on his face. She yearned to turn away altogether, but couldn't avoid seeing its pinkish complexion of a man no longer young and its expression of stubbornness and tension. Nikandrov's customary jocularly and spontaneity probably had such an effect on people and were so enjoyable precisely because they came from a man who wasn't in the least jocund, who was not a chatter-box or a back-slapping fellow, but a science worker constantly contemplating something, some underlying idea, some problem which was known to him alone. This time his tension had a very special effect on Irina Victorovna; perhaps it was because she felt extremely tense herself. She made a mental note that she did not detect within herself anything that could be classified as love or infatuation, nothing of what her memory was willing to suggest to her from the days of her faraway girlhood, or from the novels she had in her time swallowed in dozens—she felt nothing, nothing at all except tension, almost mechanical and material, like the one probably experienced by machines before something in them—some part or unit—breaks because of an excessive load, wrong, incompetent exploitation or the absence of normal work conditions and proper care.

"Is it the effect of the twentieth century?" she thought, as if till this day she had lived in the nineteenth or even earlier, as if she had learned only this instant that it was the twentieth century and today was the first working day of the new year, and that everything that was happening within her was happening to her, and not a heroine from a recited story or a well-known novel.

Nikandrov bade farewell and left, and someone in the room said, the moment he closed the door: "What a dear!" Irina Victorovna and Nyurok exchanged glances and as the result Nyurok was now convinced that during the New Year holidays Irina Victorovna and Vassili Nikandrovich had met some place and that something had happened between the two of them.

There was no hope of disabusing Nyurok; neither today nor tomorrow would Irina Victorovna have the required self-control; perhaps she would not even have to try and disabuse Nyurok because ... as a matter of fact, had not Vassili Nikandrovich been at Kanunnikov's party? Hadn't he been

present? And what did it matter whether he was there or just in her thoughts? What difference did it make?

In about an hour and a half Irina Victorovna was more or less herself again and began giving orders to her subordinates though avoiding Nyurok; she tried to concentrate on the meaning of the request application, its form covered with coloured pencil marks, but she was unable to understand a thing...

It was the first time ever she didn't understand what Nikandrov had meant—she felt he had confused something, had made a mistake—had written the wrong cypher out of the card-index and outlined an incorrect programme to be coded for the computer... "Looks like I'll have to go and ask him!" she thought with terror. Go to him! It appeared that in these few seconds he had become "Him" and "He" to her, not an abstract Doctor of Physics by the name of Nikandrov Vassili Nikandrovich, head of the fifth department of Research Institute-9.

She was feeling terribly ill at ease and quite unwell; the necessity of going to him or asking him by phone to come over, so that he could clear up things she was unable to understand in his request application—this was already an event, one of great importance; it meant there were things between them that had to be sorted out.

She thought hard over the application trying to discover where Nikandrov had let a mistake creep in. There was some inaccuracy but she couldn't figure out what it was, so she began formulating on paper the questions she was going to ask him to help discover his mistake. She covered the sheet of paper with questions from top to bottom—these were different variants of questions to be asked—but upon close reading, all of them sounded stupid.

This is what she finally wrote:

"V.N-ch! Pl-se ex-se me for dist-ng you, but it s-ms to me t-re is a mi-ke h-re (to p-nt out!) in y-r req-st appl-on. Or p-ps t-re is smth I d-n't un-nd?" Which was supposed to mean: "Vassili Nikandrovich! Please excuse me for disturbing you, but it seems to me there is a mistake here (to point out!) in your request application. Or perhaps there is something I didn't understand?"

She learned this little note by heart and rose from her desk, ready to go to Nikandrov, when the door was flung open

and Vassili Nikandrovich almost ran into room No. 475.

"Irina Victorovna!" he began. "Please excuse me for disturbing you again, but it seems to me that here," he pointed his finger at the middle of the form lying on the desk, "I have made a mistake in my request application." They silently looked at each other...

When we are close, Irina Victorovna thought, I will ask him how it could've happened? How could there be such a coincidence—an exactly similar text? And she folded the bit of paper, on which she had a minute before written the same words: "V. N-ch! Pl-se ex-se me for dist-ng you, but..."

When we are close, I will show him this bit of paper, this material evidence... It will be hard to believe otherwise that everything really happened the way it did and was not just a flight of fancy...

And while Irina Victorovna thought these improbable thoughts, Nikandrov once more amazed her and the entire department by pronouncing a phrase which couldn't have possibly belonged to him:

"There is something else I forgot—in addition to what I had written in the request I also need..."

And began to explain, hurriedly and not very clearly, what he wanted in addition to what he had requested, while Irina Victorovna listened to him and thought: Here's fate for you! What is it if not fate?

Now not only Nyurok but all the rest of her colleagues in room No. 475 seemed to have understood everything...

Here's fate for you! repeated Irina Victorovna and asked herself, and what can I say about my fate, what do I know and remember about it? Nothing... Then she corrected herself: What do I mean by "nothing"? Of course I remember certain things.

The train was rolling along; Irochka was sitting in a compartment for four effortlessly crossing the space of European Russia and then Asia.

Her journey was very much like her whole life: it proceeded in endless expectation—both in dream and in reality—of real life, which might be hiding in the next car, or might appear after the train made another turn on the glittering railway curve; it may come tomorrow or next hour.

Any minute now this life could stealthily approach Irochka

from behind, cover her eyes with her palms and say: "Guess who? Guess what?"

Irochka would have guessed without hesitation. Because she had been waiting. It wasn't a case of reckless and ignorant youth, she realised already that the "someone" and "something" could turn out to be God knows how difficult, even unbearably so, but nevertheless she lived in constant expectation, in the conviction that some event was bound to happen which would alter the course of her life. She felt wonderfully free and enjoyed her trip so much because she could get out at any wayside station, without having to ask anybody's permission, change for the train travelling in the opposite direction and go all the way back home, to her mother, but she could just as well stay to live at the wayside station and see what it would be like.

And this after Irochka had taken a long time marking a decision and finally made it—she was going! And off she had gone. It was all very simple: if she had made up her mind to go she could have just as well decided the opposite, made any other choice; if her own decision came as something unexpected to her it only showed that surprise packets were all around her and each of them only waited for its chance to reveal itself. In any case you should always start by being happy to meet the unexpected and then come what may.

At that time, soon after the war, the trains didn't run according to a strict schedule. Departing from Moscow from the Yaroslavl railway station, as it does now, at one and the same hour and even minute, they brought their passengers to Vladivostok in nine, ten and sometimes even twelve days,—nor did this surprise anyone.

People were surprised at something else: the war had only just ended but the trains were running along the glittering rails in different directions, just as they used to before the war; clean linen was given to you in carriages with reserved seats, even if not always; boiling hot water was available in all the cars, while at the stations you could not only barter needles and matches for food but also buy milk and pickles with ordinary money.

Trains in those days passed through rarefied air which for a fairly long time now had been free of bombings and the ear-rending wailing of the sirens; there were no more reports from the theatre of operations, nor were there any operations

as such. Numerous lives were also no longer there, carried away by these very operations, lives which no one could ever return. But despite all this, the trains still travelled in different directions, through the rarefied air of Europe and Asia, they travelled now able to do without commandants or officers in charge of troops transportation.

This was the first time Irochka had left home. And her destination was so far away!

The that time Irochka was possessed with a peculiar feeling, as she moved on together with the train and felt both joy and pain for this tragic thinness of the air, and of the whole world around her; she was perturbed by the insistence with which chance dogged her footsteps. Some remarkable turn in her fate was lurking round the corner.

Perhaps it was because of all this that on the eighth day of the journey, right after they passed Khabarovsk, a passenger from the neighbouring compartment made a declaration of love to her.

She had only just climbed to her shelf—the one on top and to the right—loosened her hair, adjusted the ethereal pillow, which must have been in use since before the war, and turned away to the wall, when the passenger knocked at the door and asked her to hurry and come out.

Irochka almost guessed what he wanted: they had only just parted, having spent a full war-time working day—twelve hours—by the window, besides it wasn't the first time and her sore feet were aching, as if it were they and not the car's wheels who were carrying her from Moscow to Vladivostok; her mouth felt dry from the great number of words she had uttered during those hours, loudly and quietly, with gaiety and sadness, quickly and taking her time; there was ringing in her ears from the words this very irrepressible and stalwart passenger, addressed to her; different landscapes had flashed by, reflected in her eyes, like on a film screen—forests and mountains with sunrises and sunsets, and with the bright star-strewn sky.

It was all nothing to the passenger—he had already crossed half the world by land, by air and by water. He had taken part in the fighting, had been on the brink of death and was now again ready for another journey, but how was she supposed to stand it, so unaccustomed to such things and so weak? It had not been so much her legs that supported her

the last few hours but her spirit, and there was not much left of it either.

And so, terribly upset and even sobbing, partly to herself and partly aloud, fearing she might wake up the other passengers in her compartment, unable to find the buttonholes on the cotton dressing-gown she had managed to buy on a clothing-card a day before she left, somehow straightening her hair in the dark, she again darted out into the passage. Fortunately, it was also almost dark, lit only by two dim lamps placed at the two ends of the car. This left her some hope that both her tousled hair and crumpled dressing-gown, which she had not managed to put even into comparative order due to the same irrepressible passenger, would remain unnoticed.

Of course, she shouldn't have come out in answer to his summons and his knock at the door, she should have let him call and knock and wake up all the passengers, and the whole compartment would have scolded and sworn at him—but it was too late now, she had thought of this marvellous solution only when already in the passage.

"Look here," he said, "is everything clear to you?"

And by asking this he again shifted the burden of responsibility onto her shoulders, thin and trembling.

But this time she told him plainly: "What are you, a monster? Yes, that's what you are, a monster!"

He understood.

"It's frightening. Believe me or not, I'm afraid."

"And the others—aren't they just as afraid? You think you've found a fearless heroine?"

Then he clasped her head in his hands, laid it on his shoulder—he was very tall, a head taller than her—and he said it. Whispered it in her ear.

"Thanks goodness! You did it at long last," she said after she had heard him out. "At last I can go to sleep. Good night."

"Have you gone out of your mind? How can you?"

"It's as easy as that. You just turn round," and she took him by the shoulders and turned him. "Next you open the door of your compartment, just like this. And step inside. Good night. Sleep tight!"

But instead of entering the door, he stepped back rebelliously.

"Is there nothing more for us to talk about?"

"Everything has been said. All the words required! There are no more words left and now we have to think in silence. In silence and by ourselves."

But before she left, she couldn't resist asking:

"Is it true there is such a continent as South America?"

"There is, you can take my word for it! We will stop at Vladivostok, make out all the necessary papers and in a month, perhaps even before that, you will see for yourself."

As she climbed to her shelf, Irochka knocked a bottle off the table—it fell and broke to pieces, and the three other passengers, three strangers, who were going nobody knows where and for what purpose, and who, for some unknown reason, had to be sleeping in her compartment—these three passengers woke up all at once and started grumbling angrily. The three of them were part of the strange mankind existing by some unknown right, which at this hour didn't know a thing about what had happened with her, inexperienced Irochka. And not knowing a thing about it, this mankind wasn't prepared to do anything to help—not even with some idea, some suggestion, or a "yes" and "no".

It must be noted that Irochka was on her way to the Kuril Islands, and it was not just her pleasure trip, but she was going to join her future husband, and her future husband was Senior Lieutenant-technician Mansurov, a very kindly man.

It had been an ordinary story, the kind that happens to ordinary, nice, and even fortunate people—they met in a military hospital. Lieutenant Mansurov was convalescing there after a wound and she, a school-leaver, used to come to help take care of the wounded.

Later, she finished school and he was discharged from hospital.

She began working as a draughtsman at a factory design office and he as a technician at the same factory.

She entered college and he was declared partly fit for service; she moved up to the third year at college and he was posted to the Far East.

He left for the Kuril Islands and wrote letters to her, begging her to come, and finally she took a leave from college and went to him in answer to his pleas. On the way she met a

passenger, who was going farther still, across the ocean, to South America. Actually, she never really believed such a continent existed. North America did, she was convinced of that, but as to South America, here she had her doubts. The concept—that's another story, she wouldn't argue about it or have any doubts; she knew everything the school programme had to say about South America and even had an excellent mark in geography. But to believe that South America was, in fact, both South and America and that someone might go there, spend some time and then return—no! this was beyond belief.

True enough, embarking on this journey she was prepared for anything, for any unexpected occurrence: the train might run off the rails and drop into Lake Baikal; she might get off the train at some wayside station and remain there for any length of time; some woman might come and ask her to take her baby and this she would, and then she would bring it along to the Kuril Islands and ask the Senior Lieutenant: "Is your love strong enough?"; she might also reach him and the two of them might sit together for an hour or two in his seaside cottage and then she would say: "Now we've seen each other... I must be going, good night..." Anything might have happened.

But could what *did* happen be true?

The three passengers fell asleep after some time, two of them snored slightly, while the third raked the air and walls with his awful high-wayman's whistling and snorting.

Digging her face into her pillow, Irochka spent the whole night, until morning, crying.

She cried because she felt she had done herself a terrible wrong. All the time, during the entire journey she had been expecting something mysterious and wonderful to happen, but when this chance came, she was defeated by it.

Her whole being was shocked by the fact that this man—so grown-up, astute and strong, so South-American and having such eyes—found her, Irochka, almost a girl, the one person he needed most of all in the world. But it immediately turned out that she was completely unprepared to such a shock, it was too much for her and therefore she was unable to cope with it and reciprocate to it in any way. The only thing she could do was tremble with what looked like happiness, her whole body shaken to the core.

The girl Irochka could not be expected to comprehend the difference between the Kuril Islands, which until now had seemed to her the end of the world, and the impossible far-away South America, that had only just now appeared out of nowhere, an inconceivable country promising an inconceivable destiny.

Once it has happened, not a single event in life remains unchanged in people's minds—from time to time people are apt to review their past. And events either completely disappear from their memory, or reappear in a new splendour, so as to achieve another existence, more real than their actuality was.

That so many years later South America should appear before her as real as her own, her present destiny,—such a paradox had seemed quite impossible to Irina Victorovna.

But it did...

That is, she was again given an opportunity of choosing: I can be this kind of person, this kind of a woman, but I can also be quite different, almost the exact opposite to the woman who exists at the present moment!

It is not quite clear what kind of woman, but completely, altogether different, that is for sure.

Again, as years before, Irina Victorovna's sore feet were aching...

Without any connection, she asked, addressing no one in particular: "Do you know if there is a belly dance in South America?"

Nyurok answered that she wasn't sure but thought there was and then asked whether Irina Victorovna was planning to learn this dance and what for?

Irina Victorovna had at some point told Nyurok something about the Far East express train, about South America and about how her sore feet ached then. Nyurok understood and remembered all of it and now, asking about the belly dance, she understood still more—she perceived the continuity of time and became seriously alarmed.

It is a very alarming sign, when Nyurok feels alarmed about you.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'V. Rasputin'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

(b. 1937 in Ust-Uda, a village
near Irkutsk)

Valentin Rasputin, a Siberian, is one of the greatest hopes of modern Soviet literature. From the start he published short novels of such significance that they called attention to his talent and personality at once. These were "Deadline", "Live and Remember" and "Farewell to Madera". There is a powerful appeal in his reflections on the abiding themes of life and death, on the purpose of life, and on man's relationships with the surrounding world.

"Live and Remember", which for its artistic merits may well be called Rasputin's masterpiece, best shows the depth and breadth of his thinking, and exemplifies the approach of Soviet writers to the problem of humanism.

Here is the plot of the story in brief: Andrei Guskov is drafted into the army at the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War in 1941 and sent to the front. He is seriously wounded in the summer of 1944 and brought to a hospital in Novosibirsk. When

the short leave he has been looking forward to has been denied him and instead he is discharged as fit for return to the fighting front, this good soldier turns deserter and goes home to Atamanovka, a village on the banks of the Angara.

At first one feels that Rasputin is sorry for him and compassionate notes are detected now and again in the narration, but as the action develops the consequences of Andrei Guskov's desertion, following a ruthless logic, work a change in the man himself. By estranging himself from his countrymen who are fighting a war, he becomes an outcast, a lone wolf who must live in hiding, and his criminal desertion casts a shadow on his family and places his wife Nastena in desperate predicament. Her life becomes one long chain of deceptions, crowned by the hardest deception of all—the parentage of her coming baby. The story has a tragic ending: Nastena throws herself into the river and Andrei flees like a wild beast to the forest depths. Thus does the author solve the problem of humanism, reserving his affection, respect and sympathies for people whose personal interests do not cause grief to others, and are not at odds with the interests of their country, their countrymen and humankind as a whole.

His mission, as Valentin Rasputin sees it, is to find and study "life's sore spots". And we have every reason to expect many more important contributions from him to Soviet and world literature.

Live and Remember

(An excerpt)

She felt better nonetheless. Her heart was lighter. Not that the weight was lifted, no. If anything, it was all the heavier, there was no hope of shedding it, but at least she knew where she stood now: it was as if after losing her way and collapsing from fatigue she had suddenly recognised the strange locality, miles away from anywhere, much farther than she thought, but now she knew how to find her way home. Whether she'd have the strength to get out and go through whatever was in store for her was another matter, but at least she knew where to go and what road to take.

For Nastena this meant taking things as they came and not crossing fate. No more thrashing about. What will be will be. She had not quite made up her mind yet, but she already realised that she had no choice. Evidently she'd have to drink up her bitter cup to the last drop. It was too late to back out of it now. And then she did not want to, because for her it would be like renouncing her own self, and the only reason she had started this argument with Andrei was to find support in his words. Where else was she to seek support? Of course he clutched at the hope she gave him, it was the breath of life to him now. It was easy enough for her to guess what he was going to say.

And so, like the bun in the children's song she was to roll on until someone stopped her. What song would she sing then, she wondered? What dangers would she escape, what end would she come to?

All in good time, though, she'd know the words of her song later, later...

The important thing was that she knew the worst now: she might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. She had gone too far, there was so much for her to fear that it was best to fear nothing and go straight ahead. She believed that she had been singled out by fate or something even higher up, otherwise so much of everything could not have befallen her at once. One surely had to be noticeable for that. Of course, her life was not easy now, but was it better to waste it away the way she had been doing and go on treading the same old path that lead nowhere and promised nothing? Mercy would

not be denied her, she thought, and if the need was bad she'd be given a helping hand, and perhaps even elevated for her sufferings, who could tell? She would endure everything that might fall to her lot, she would bear up under it, anything was better than continuing as the barren, useless woman she was—better not live at all then.

Since a child, like every living person, Nastena dreamed of happiness, her picture of it changing with the years. When she grew old enough to marry, her happiness was as carefree and light-hearted as she was herself, it was all about her in the air and might visit her any minute—her heart was wide open to receive it. This is how it was in her dreams: she stood in the middle and happiness playfully flew up to her now from the left, now from the right, it teased her, tickled her with its fleeting caress, beckoned to her, and then, promising bliss, flew off for the time. There was so much of it, full of such boundless beauty, untasted joys, love and pleasure, that she could not wait to plunge headlong into it, and wallow and wallow in happiness, squandering it every day and every hour, so that it should not outlive her. At the same time, the waiting was so deliciously sweet that she wanted to hold off the moment of her final meeting with it, since this appeared inevitable anyway, sooner or later. She agreed to marry Andrei without pausing to think that thereby she was leaving just this one road open to happiness, a road she herself had chosen, wide and spacious at the start with room enough for good and bad to pass each other by without touching. She pictured married life as something secure though, of course, hard-working, and her relations with her husband—gay and easy. The workdays would seem shorter then, and the holidays more festive. To be sure, she might sometimes blunder or trip, nothing ever went without a hitch, but then she'd right herself and they'd go on living in love and agreement. It must be said that from the first Nastena dreamed of being the giver of love and care rather than the taker; it was up to her, the woman, to smooch the sharp corners of married life, it was for this that women were endowed with that magic power which, amazingly, became the gentler and the richer the more often it was used. Nastena believed that it would be like that with her, and only in this she had not been mistaken, it seemed. And happiness, what of happiness? It did appear, beckon to her and promise bliss

at first, but then it left her in her childlessness and flew on ahead—it was there, she would catch up with it, but the road on which they might meet had become half as narrow, more like a path now, though it was still clear enough to make out.

Nastena never looked back, never regretted what she had done or worried belatedly that somewhere, sometime she took a wrong turn. Life was not a piece of clothing which you could try on dozens of times. Whatever there was, it was all yours, and it was no good disowning any of it, however bad. She'd had some bad days with Andrei, but she never re-patterned her fate even in her thoughts; she did make adjustments for the future, that she did, but never re-patterned what she had or pictured having a different man for a husband. She'd have to make a different person of herself as well, and who'd let her? Never mind about the others, she'd live her life the way she had started it, and she was not going to sway this way and that. She'd wait for her own and not someone else's happiness.

There isn't enough of it to go round, they say, some are lucky, others aren't. But there was only one of her in the world, no one could take her place, so why was it she who had to go without? Who had distributed it like that? Why was she allowed to live then if she might be done out of the happiness she was born for? Her whole life was in her, in her heart, her soul, her body, the rest may be close but anyway apart from her, existing only thanks to her, so why should the happiness intended for her miss her and come to someone else? No, that wasn't right, a person should not be cheated like that. It would be another matter if she were to live for a second, a third time afterwards and make up for what she'd missed. But she wouldn't live a second time. One had to make the best of whatever one had, spend everything, keep nothing for a rainy day, because one would have no use for it afterwards.

The war held back Nastena's happiness for a long time, but even during the war she believed that it would come. There'd be peace, Andrei would return home, and their life together which the war had interrupted for several years would start anew. She could not picture it differently. And then Andrei returned before time, before victory, and muddled everything, broke up the orderly course of events, and caused a mix-up which Nastena could never have anticipated. It wasn't

happiness she had to think about now. It had taken fright and moved away, hiding in a dense fog, and there was no path to it any more, no hope.

Things could only be expected to go from bad to worse.

Was she to do without till the very end? Nastena had never been in such a terrible plight yet. And all was darkness ahead, not a glimmer of light. Things were really going from bad to worse for her—it was bad today and it wouldn't be better tomorrow. But the "worse" was the baby she wanted with all her being, the happiness she longed for! Didn't it mean that she was very close to it though approaching it from behind? Or perhaps it was happiness that had come from the wrong side? What was the difference? The main thing was not to miss it.

But what good was this happiness to her just now?

Something simply had to happen and straighten out her life, otherwise her sanity might snap easily enough. Why, something did happen: she had conceived a child. She had been noticed, she wouldn't be allowed to perish. What more did she want if she had a child? And she was going to have it, it was on its way, it was!

She knew now what she must do. She must do nothing. Let things run their course. Her own, lawful happiness must be waiting for her somewhere, near or far, as anguished as she was because they could not come together.

They lay side by side talking of nothing in particular as if they wanted to wrap that which was most important to them, and so fragile and insecure, in soft, protective nothings. Talking was easier when you were lying down; closing your eyes you could say things you would be too shy to say to a person's face, you could withdraw into the privacy of silence if you wished, and then come together again.

Darkness fell, and though there was no moon a cold, dismal light seeped in from the whiteness of the snow. In this light Andrei and Nastena looked like rag dolls, their faces bloodless, their movements prompted by some outside power. Their voices also seemed to come from somewhere beyond. And even they themselves felt strange and unreal in this intimate hour, for such was the penitential, quiet and subdued mood, with all forgiven before parting, in which the

drastically upsetting day was taking its leave. And so they spoke in humble, soft voices, hardly above a whisper. Their conversation was free from strain, it was light and unentangled, swinging gently like a pendulum that could hurry and pause at will, stop altogether if it liked, and then start swinging to and fro once more. After one such pause, Andrei asked unexpectedly:

“Nastena, what do you want of me?”

“Want of you, how?” Nastena did not understand.

“Well I know what I want of you. And you know it too. We’ve talked about it today and I’m not going to begin from the beginning again. There’s a lot I want of you besides. It’s you who provide me with bread and with clothing. Everything there is here has passed through your hands. I’m ashamed to take things from you, just taking and taking, and never giving anything in return. There’s a bit of conscience left in me, it seems. I’m being kept by you, I’m your dependant, some dependant, too, as bad as ten. What’s ten, more! Because of me you have to go in fear of people now. It’s one thing for me to be afraid, I deserve to be afraid, but what about you? Why should you quarrel with the whole wide world? I know: you were sorry for me. And you’ll feel the same way about you know what. That’s the kind you are. You won’t do anything about it, you’ll see. I’m not egging you on, no. I know you. Even if you wanted to, you couldn’t do it. Mark my words, Nastena. I’m making you shoulder more and more while I myself stay out of everything, leaving you to struggle on alone. You were right. But what can I do? What can I do, Nastena, you tell me. I’d be glad to help you, but how? I want to help, I’m not used to living off others, I’d turn myself inside out to do something for you, but what, tell me what would you have me do?”

“What? Nothing.”

“There you are,” he caught up her words eagerly, as if he had expected nothing else. “Nice doings: I need help and you don’t. That’s how low I have sunk: a useless article, no good to anyone. I knew it myself, but still I kept hoping. Supposing you asked me to do something? No, you didn’t. Even if it was only some small thing? No, not even that. Seems all I can do you is harm, all I can give you is this bother with me. I’m a finished man, of course, I knew what I was letting myself in for, but I had a hope that maybe I wasn’t a finished man for

you. Maybe you'd give me a little charity, maybe you'd find a place for me in your life?" In spite of his violent, scorching pain he spoke unhurriedly and calmly, seeming to take delight in his self-mockery and his endurance of the pain. "Seems you're only sorry for me. It's my salvation, of course, just now, but you can't rely on pity alone for long—it's a pretty thin thread, might snap any moment."

"What are you saying, Andrei? What's the matter with you?" Nastena broke in in a frightened voice. "I thought you asked me just like that, and I answered you just like that, and look how you've turned everything round! How can you? Why do you talk that way? For no reason at all you went and swerved aside, throwing me off the sled. You'd better not throw me off, not me. You might have more use for me yet. If you want me to I'll find a thousand things for you to do."

"Such as?"

"For a start, stop talking like that. I'm really going to have a hard time soon, and if even you stop trusting me what will I be left with?"

"You'd be better off without me, sure enough."

"Of course I would," she agreed. "And better still without myself. My, wouldn't it be nice not to know anything, not to see, not to hear, feel no pain, no suffering! But how can I get away from myself I'd like to know if I'm here? Why do you tell me how it would be without you? I don't want to know about it. And don't you separate me from yourself, don't." Nastena righted her breaking voice, and continued: "Let's stick together. You're guilty, and I'm guilty with you. We'll hold answer together. Maybe it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for me. So don't you try to shoulder all the blame alone. I was with you all the time—didn't you see me? Wherever you were I was with you. And you were here with me. We even had the same dreams, doesn't that mean anything? It does, Andrei, it does. We were everywhere together, whether you like it or not, one half here and one half there. Do you think that if you came home a hero I'd be left out in the cold? Like fear! You mean I wouldn't be allowed to rejoice with you? Why, I'd feel more of a hero than you: my man, not anyone else's! Why, I'd strut as proud as can be: look at me, women, and envy me, look at me covered with glory!"

"I wish you wouldn't bring it up, comparing sort of..."

"Why not? Why shouldn't I bring it up? It turned out differently for you, and this means that I failed you. Maybe you didn't trust me that's why you couldn't stay away, or maybe you didn't think I cared enough, or something. Don't take my guilt upon yourself, it's mine, I know. Now, just supposing I couldn't stand the waiting, got myself another man, and gone away with him I don't know where—would you blame just me alone?"

"Who else?"

"Ah no, it would be your fault too. Of course you'd be in it. I'd never do a thing like that without your help. Maybe it was decided between us long before it happened, maybe we couldn't even remember when it was decided, but we certainly decided it together, all by myself I'd never have dared. Heavens, what am I saying! I'd never have dared, of course, but what I'm trying to tell you is that we can't divide our lot. We married to share our lives. It's easy living together when everything goes well; it's like sleeping, all you have to do is breathe in and breathe out. It's when things go wrong that husband and wife must stick together, that's what people marry for. I couldn't give you a child, but you didn't throw me out. You accepted me the way I was, you didn't run to look for someone better. So who'd let me disown you now, I'd like to know? Why, I'd draw and quarter myself for it afterwards, I'd..."

"Wrongs differ, Nastena. I'm a criminal, there's a law against me. Why should you become a criminal with me?"

"It's too late to ask now. You ought to have thought about it before you broke the law. And once you did, you got me into it with you. That's the only way for me. You told me yourself that we're tied with one string. And we are. Only you've got to trust me, otherwise it will be bad for both of us, we'll be our own undoing." Nastena fell silent, waiting to hear what Andrei would say, but he was so slow to answer that she went on: "Maybe I'd like a different fate myself, but different fates have fallen to others, and this one is mine. And I'm not going to regret it. It's mine." Again she paused, and then added: "Everything will work out, Andrei. It's got to. You'll see."

Still he made no answer.

"And I'm happy as it is. You remember that I never needed much for happiness. I'm with you, and I'm happy, everything

else is somewhere far, far away. I don't remember what was before and I don't picture what's ahead. Somehow I don't even believe there's anything more ahead. I'd be satisfied if it remained like this forever—you and me, the two of us together. Only I'd make you shave off your beard, you're a sort of stranger with it. I can't get used to it, I just can't, that's all."

Raising herself up a little, Nastena turned to look at him, and though he could not see her he knew from the change in her breathing that she was smiling. All this time they had lain motionless, flat on their backs, with their faces turned ceilingwards, speaking their thoughts aloud rather than talking to each other. Andrei had kept his eyes closed from the first, it was really easier like that. And now, in response to Nastena's smile, he opened his eyes, met her earnest, compliant gaze and, unable to hold it, looked away.

"Why did we never talk like this before?" he asked with calm and hopeless regret, and shook his head sorrowfully. "Everything might have gone differently, altogether another way. But maybe it only seems so now, I'm damned if I know. Still, we never talked like that, never. We only spoke when we had something definite to say, just everyday things of no real matter. There was plenty of time in the four years we were married to have a real talk, to go deeper into each other's thoughts. Because I see now that I never knew you properly. Only by sight. I had a wife and that was that, and I didn't even know what I really had. To think that I struck you!"

"You never did."

"I didn't?"

"No."

"You mean you don't want to remember the bad. If you don't you don't. But it would be less hard on me, I suppose, if you did remember. You're too good to me. I'll owe you too big a debt, and I've nothing to pay it back with, you can see that for yourself. Ah, Nastena! Pity you have me for a husband and not someone else. I mean it seriously. You're one in a million! Why did you ever marry me, it beats me!"

"I don't want another, I'm fine with you. I have already told you. And don't you decide for me."

"Sure, you're fine, couldn't be better..."

"You don't understand anything, Andrei," Nastena said in a

plaintive, hurt whisper, and dropped her head on her jacket which she had used for a pillow. "Where were you, I'd like to know, if you didn't notice whether I was happy with you or not? When you brought me to your home I didn't know a soul here, everything was strange to me, everything. I went with you blind-folded: wherever you brought me it would be all right with me. I hardly knew you either, we met two or three times in fun, and got engaged almost in fun. Till the last I didn't believe that you'd come for me. D'you think I wasn't scared? Starting life anew, with nothing left of my old life, just my own self alone, and even then I couldn't tell any more if it was me or not. I guess you remember how we got off the ship, and I was afraid to raise my eyes and stumbled on level ground, remember? And then we climbed up the bank, I tripped over my own feet and fell down. People laughed, and I felt worse still, so sick I felt that everything swam before my eyes. You guessed that I was frightened, took me by the hand and led me. When we came to the house, you said to your folks: this is she, my wife. Your father asked: what's her name? Nastya, I told him. And he changed it to Nastena, and I've been called Nastena ever since. And your mother just looked and said nothing. She didn't like me very much, I could see it, she was disappointed, I guessed. You noticed it too. You noticed it and said: she has no one else here, there's no one to protect her, so let's not maltreat her. You said it with a laugh, like a joke, but it was no joking matter at all. It was then that I felt sure that I'd be safe married to you, that I'd be happy with you, although I did rush into it.

"That same evening you took me round to people. Remember? We called on Vitya Berezhkin, Maxim Vologzhin, and others. I forgot to tell you: Maxim came home the other day. He came back with a crippled arm, badly crippled, people say, he still carries it in a sling." No response came from Andrei to this news, and Nastena continued: "You didn't take me round to show me off, but because you wanted me to meet people right away and not be an outsider among them. True enough: next morning I ran into Vitya's Nadya and my eyes fair popped. Fancy running into someone I knew! But for the life of me I couldn't place her, and only then it struck me: heavens above, it was only the evening before that we met, and everything got mixed up in my silly head. I was so glad to see her, like a long lost friend. You and I slept in the

barn, remember? It was your idea, and a bed was made up for us there. Funny idea, I thought at first, but it was neat and clean inside, you know that small barn, the end one. Only it was pitch dark because it had no window. What happened to that plank bed afterwards, who took it down? Why, it was you who took it down, I guess. That's right, you wanted to build a grain bin there. Pity, really. Such a nice plank bed it was. It was dark like under the ground, but it smelt so nicely of wood shavings, your father used to do his carpentry work there before, or something. And you, too, smelt of wood shavings, I remember it so well. Are you scared, you asked me. No, I said, with you I'm not. And suddenly a rooster in the hen coop next door let out a screech at the top of his crazy voice, and did I jump!" Nastena laughed softly and tenderly at the memory. With a light sigh, she went on: "In the morning I could hardly find the door. I groped and groped for it and couldn't find it. And you stayed in bed and forgot all about your bride. I went down to the river and had a look at the kitchen gardens, both the one and the other. I didn't want to have breakfast without you, and waited. And then your mother went and roused you. I remember we all had tea and rolls together—father, mother, you and I. And you kept pulling my leg on the quiet as if I were out all night somewhere, fooling you were. And then you said: let's go. Where? That would be telling, you said. And you took me up the hill, right to the top, and from there you showed me the fields, the wastes, everything, and we walked about until dark. And when we got home, there were your friends waiting for us. Set out the *tarasun*¹, they said, since you went and got married. Vitya was there, and Maxim Vologzhin too. Vitya's been killed, you know, don't you? I wrote you about it. I don't remember if I wrote you that Nadya gave birth to a little girl after he went off to the war. She's got three kids now, and the hard time she's having, terribly hard, but what's to be done?"

Nastena looked out of the corner of her eye at Andrei—he may have been made of stone, even his breathing did not give him away, and she was sorry she mentioned Vitya. Andrei and Vitya had been pals. But she did not hasten to change the subject, and probably couldn't even if she wanted to. The

¹ A Siberian home-distilled vodka.— *Tr.*

trembling with eagerness and anxiety lest she should abandon it and not go on. It came so overwhelmingly close as if it were trying to sweep her off her feet, fill her entire being with itself, and guide her where it willed. Indeed, everything in that memory was so happy and peaceful, it held so much promise! Still, Nastena hushed this memory: enough was enough. Succumbing to a different memory, a different mood, she asked with a smile:

“D’you remember how I came to visit you in town when you were studying for an accountant?”

It was during the second winter of their life together that Andrei was sent to town by the collective farm to take a course in bookkeeping. He didn’t have much of an education but he did go to school for six years which was something anyway, and so he was talked out of training for a tractor driver and persuaded to become a bookkeeper. A bookkeeper was quite a somebody, though not quite like a tractor driver, and the best thing about it was having regular hours and staying put. Tractor drivers had to spend months away from home working strange fields belonging to collective farms that were serviced by the Machine and Tractor Stations. When Andrei had to make his choice that decided him.

He came home for New Year and stayed a week, and in February Nastena went to visit him. It was all of seventy kilometres to town, with a stopover for the night on the way. Nastena’s fellow-travellers in the covered sleigh were Innokenty Ivanovich and Vassilisa the Wise who had some urgent business in the hospital in town. To while the time away, Nastena and Innokenty Ivanovich chatted about everything under the sun, while Vassilisa the Wise remained her usual taciturn self. You couldn’t get a word out of that woman! They reached town on the evening of the second day of travel, agreed to get all their business done in the course of the following day, and went their separate ways. All the business Nastena had was to see Andrei, and no matter how many days she was allowed it would never be enough anyway.

Andrei lived in a wretched cottage with wall-eyed little windows on the bank of a small river not far from the river. Nastena’s arrival was not welcomed by the landlady, and even less so by Andrei’s roommate—a middle-aged, sullen

man with a pockmarked face and spectacles shaped like blinkers, with different lenses, one much darker than the other. He lay on his bed reading a book, and did not bother to get up or greet Nastena by so much as a word. Andrei hustled about a bit, but his hints fell on deaf ears and finally he took Nastena to stay the night at the Collective Farmers' Hostel.

From the first, Nastena planned this visit with a tiny, secret hope which was so slender that she dared not admit it even to herself, let alone to Andrei, heaven forbid! She could not conceive at home, but maybe she could here. At home, they were too used to each other, everything had become routine, and here the novelty of their surroundings might quite easily make a difference.

It is truly said that by-blows are conceived the quickest and are hardest to get rid of, they only wait to be forgotten and that's when they spring a surprise on the girl: here I am, regards from Daddy! It was different for Nastena, of course, hers would be a legitimate love child, but because it was far from home it would be different. She did not believe that this trick would work, but the less faith she had in it the more she wanted to give it a try.

"Remember, that morning you did not go to classes and took me to the tea shop, right there across the road. Remember they had a huge samovar on the table, I've never seen anything that big. It leaked at the bibcock, quite badly too, and a soup plate was placed under it. Why couldn't they get it soldered, I don't know! And then that woman who was pouring the tea quickly emptied that plate into your glass. But you noticed. Oh no, you said, I'll have mine from the samovar. And she got nasty: that's from the samovar too. And you said: no, it's water from the slop dish, not tea. Rubbish, she said. Slop dish, you said. But finally she gave in, and poured you a fresh glass from the samovar. I also remember that you'd bought me some sweets in paper wrappers and I crunched them with my tea instead of sugar. They had honey in them, those sweets had, real aromatic too—you'd eat one, and the taste remained for a long time in your mouth, it didn't go." Nastena made a smacking sound and ran her tongue over her lips, as though evoking a taste of that never-forgotten sweetness.

"Well then, we ate and drank, and then went back to your place. That sourface with the unmatched glasses was out, but

bookkeeping classes, so she just eat there, glaring at us, watching to see what we'd do. That mean old hag, she knew we were waiting for her to go, but she stayed on to spite us. A bright idea you had then how to get rid of her: you gave her some money and asked her to go and buy a small bottle of vodka. You told me afterwards that she liked buying her vodka herself and never trusted the job to anyone. Well, she started getting ready to go. All right, she said, I'll run this errand for you, but only because it's for vodka, I wouldn't budge for anything else in the world. And you said to her: don't run, you've plenty of time. I may have plenty of time, dearie, but if I were you I'd latch the door anyway, she said, so that when I re-enter my house everything will be right and proper."

Nastena laughed—a warm, intimate laugh that did not shake her body. It was as if a small, neat wheel rolled over the water and vanished.

"And then you and I walked and walked all day, where didn't we go," she dropped her voice to a whisper, and continued dreamily. "You didn't leave my side, you were glad we were together, I could see that you were glad, you know. And I, was I glad! It was a cold winter day, but I was warm all over from happiness. I could feel my face burning, growing hot from inside, and my hands shaking. At first I was scared you'd ask me what I came for. What for, really? Could I explain it in words? There wasn't anything I had to see you about, I simply came, and there I was. Dropped down on you from a clear sky, I did. I made you miss lessons, and we went on a spree! We saw a picture, too!" Nastena gasped and almost screamed. "Remember? We went to the pictures! Look what nearly slipped my memory. It doesn't hold the most important things any more, what a rubbishy memory I have now! In the sled, going back home the next day, I told them all about the picture and even Vassilisa wanted to talk, that's how it got her! Remember, you and I sat in the back row under the little window from which the movie light comes. Towards the end of the picture you pressed close to me and whispered: maybe you won't go tomorrow, maybe you'll stay another day? I shook my head, and tears just poured and poured down my face: fancy, you yourself had asked me to stay. I thought my heart would jump out...

“And then, do you remember what happened afterwards, Andrei? You could die laughing! Before taking me back to the hostel, we dropped in at your place again. We knew that the old hag would be kinder to us now. When we came in she said to you: give me the price of another bottle and stay the night here in my kitchen, my friend will put me up, she and I will sit over the bottle together and get some warmth into our old bones. You gave her the money—why not oblige an old woman? She left, but before we knew it she was back: the shop was closed and there was no sense in visiting her friend without a bottle. Then you rushed out yourself, got a bottle somewhere, and packed the old hag off. And then—wonder of wonders!—sourface didn’t come home either, and you and I had the house to ourselves all night. Oh, Andrei! And you ask if I was happy with you! How can you ask? Heavens! Just think, what more can I want?”

But Andrei no longer heard or understood her. At first he followed Nastena’s reminiscences, and as he did so his heart ached more and more with a bitter-sweet pain because all this had really happened once, he also remembered everything but only vaguely, drily, bleakly and hastily, as if it had happened not to him but to someone else before him, someone who had given him his memory. Andrei didn’t know what to do with it now. Because it was so keen and inquisitive it could bring him nothing but suffering, and it did not get along with his own memory. They refused to understand each other, they contrived, while inhabiting the same vessel, to occupy places apart in it, never mixing and never trespassing on each other’s territory. Still, his own memory was the meaner and the stronger and when it wanted to it took the upper hand.

This is exactly what happened now. Without answering Nastena he listened to her softly excited talk, keeping track with her and sometimes falling behind to dwell on some particulars of his own. And although he faithfully followed her along the beaten track, he kept stumbling frequently and painfully, looking back over his shoulder and fearing the dead end to which she might lead him. And so when his own recollections overtook him, he felt no surprise, for that’s how it had to be, he may have been expecting it, hoping to get it over with quickly, going through what he had to, and then return to Nastena once more.

This recollection began with nothing, with the slenderest thread of a cobweb which he inadvertently pushed forward and which proved enough to conjure up a different picture, just conjuring it up at first, and then crushing him under. It was closer to the present day, and Andrei had no strength to push it away. This last war memory of his always came unexpectedly and held him in its grip for hours, cruelly and relentlessly highlighting each detail, compelling him to go through the shuddering horror of the experience over and over again. That was, in fact, the turning point after which his whole life went askew. Wounded, he was taken to hospital, and from there he did not return to the ranks but simply went home.

...On a warm summer evening, having finished with their preparatory bombardment from a sheltered position, they made ready to move to a new site. There was no longer any need to maintain communication with their observers. The battery on the right had already packed up, and the one on the left was still pottering about. They weren't rushed particularly. The gun crew of which Andrei was the loader had already taken the sight off their howitzer, folded and locked the mounts, and were now fussing with the covers. The wailing roar of motors came from behind a humpy, sparsely wooded rise, and two prime movers, their battered bodies swinging from side to side, were already creeping up to the guns.

It must have been the noise made by these prime movers that muffled the growling roar of the tanks. The attention of the men had become so lax as they packed and prepared for the move, and their sense of danger had become so blunted that even if they did hear the roar, the strangeness of the sound did not penetrate and they took no notice of it. And so when the German tanks appeared on the hill in front of them and, slowing down in dismay for a fraction of a second, came rolling downhill, they thought they were seeing things. How come? There were no Germans in front! How come? Shouts rose from both batteries, the gun crews dashed about, tearing off the covers, spreading apart the mounts, lowering and swinging round the guns. Andrei, rushing to the shell box, was stunned and hurled to the ground, and as he fell, even with his eyes closed, he seemed to see the wheel of the howitzer to the left of him revolving in slow motion, rising off the ground and descending once more. Realising that he was

alive, Andrei sprang forward and grabbed the box.

There were five tanks. The first battery had been quick enough to fire and hit one of them, and it was now burning. Andrei's battery had not fired a single shot yet. Their commanding officer was shouting strenuously and hoarsely, but the crew knew what they had to do without orders. The tanks separated at the foot of the hill: two of them made for the first battery, and the other two for the second, trickily manoeuvring over the line between the batteries to make them fire at each other. However, there was no time to worry about that.

The first, main howitzer loaded by Andrei fired just one shot. In the next moment something crashed with a brief, quivering jangle, and he was thrown aside, somersaulting as he went.

Nastena's voice came to him from far, far away, it had a dreamy, tender sound, and the rise and fall of her voice made him shivery. He did not get the words, for in his ears still rang the din of that short yet terrible clash of armour in which the men seemed superfluous; before his eyes flickered the scenes of this battle in short, recurring flash-backs; a stench assailed his nostrils; and rolled into one hot tangle were the screams, the strip of earth clawed bare and black by the trail spade there had been no time to secure, the prime movers hurrying back for cover, the gun layer who, lifting his head, peered into his disembowelled belly, and the cover of the gun barrel flung up by the blast. He saw all this against the approaching clang of the tank tracks, the sound swelling in volume from fear.

All at once Nastena's voice vanished. He turned cautiously even before he quite came to and returned from this last battle and saw something so entirely different in Nastena's eyes: a tenderness evoked by her own memories. Breaking down, Andrei thrust his head into her bosom and moaned.

"Why, Andrei! What's wrong?" she asked, frightened.

A whisper almost burst from his lips.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing, Nastena. You're here. You're with me."

But he was still afraid that the battle he had just come out of was, in fact, the present, and continued to peer round him warily.

"Whatever got into your head?" Nastena lovingly stroked

his head, unsuspecting that they were worlds apart in thought. "Silly fool, that's what you are. Getting some funny ideas about me into your head. It's you who're maybe not happy with me, but don't you speak for me. I was always happy with you, always, so just remember it. I couldn't even think of living without you. How could I—without you? All these years of waiting it's you I waited for, not someone else. I never went to sleep without first talking with you, and in the morning I never got up before I'd reached you and found out how you were. I honestly believed I could see you: there'd be nothing at first, just a noise like the whistling of the wind, then it would drop and drop which meant that I'd almost reached you, and then—there you were! Always by yourself, I don't know why. You'd be sitting or standing, dressed in uniform, looking so sad, so sad, with no one beside you. I'd take one look, make sure that you were alive, and hurry away: couldn't stay there long, or talk. After that, I'd go on again, day after day, suffering my longing for you as best I could. Perhaps my longing for you was too strong, you were never free of me and maybe it interfered with your fighting. How was I to know what I must and must not do, I did what I could, no one set me right or told me. You didn't either. Oh, Andrei, Andrei..."

He clutched his head in his hands and, moving it quickly from side to side as if to shake off an insupportable weight, moaned:

"God, what have I done! What have I done, Nastena!" Dropping his hands, he turned his face to her. "Don't come here any more, you hear me? Don't come. I'll go away. I'll go for good. This can't go on. Enough. I can't torment myself any more and torment you. I can't."

"Oh no," Nastena said. "You'll go and what about me? What's going to happen to me, did you give this thought? What am I to do with my guilt? I can't lay it before people, can I? No, let's stick together. Let's talk it over, Andrei, let's not do anything rash. Maybe everything will work out, it's got to. My mother always said: there's no such guilt that can't be forgiven. They're human, aren't they? When the war ends we'll see. Maybe it will be all right for you to come out and confess, maybe there'll be some other way. Just don't go. Alone, you'll come to grief. I will too, I'll come to grief first. Here at least I know where you are. And if I really am with

child? You alone will know that the baby is yours and no one else's. Who else can I talk to, pour my troubles to—I don't belong anywhere any more... You won't go, tell me you won't?"

He did not answer, and then just shook his head.

"That's better, that's better," she sighed and, after a silence, turned to the window. "Isn't it dark, though. I quite forgot that I've got to go. Get up, Andrei, come on, you said you'd see me away. Come on, at least we'll be together a bit longer. And don't get any silly ideas into your head. You are not alone. If you were, you could do as you wished."

In the darkness he could not see the tears trickling down her cheeks.

1974

Translated by Olga Shartse

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Markov". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

(b. 1911, village of Novo-Kuskovo near Tomsk)

Georgi Markov, a Siberian writer born in the family of a peasant and hunter, for many years has had the honour and borne the immense responsibility of heading the Union of Soviet Writers.

The main tradition handed down from one generation to the other in the Markov family was the story of the Tambov settlers' desperate and monstrously difficult opening up of the wild Siberian taiga in the last century. Metre by metre they wrested land from the taiga and put it under the plough. In one of his first novels, THE STROGOVS, Georgi Markov tells their story, describing their hard struggle for life and the taiga villages of the past. In order to write this chronicle of the life of Siberia's simple folk, Markov made use both of his own family traditions and of previously untouched historical documents. As a result, he was able to produce a historical novel in the full sense of the word; it reflects the history of the development of the Siberian countryside, its awakening to

revolution, its struggle for Soviet power, and the first steps taken by the Soviets in Siberia. *THE STROGOVS* was published in full in 1946 and was followed in 1960 by the novel *SALT OF THE EARTH*, which in some ways can be said to be a sequel to it. Markov's next novel, *THE FATHER AND HIS SON*, was completed by him in 1964 and continues describing the people of Siberia, telling of their construction of the new, modern life.

Georgi Markov's liking for and ability to handle sweeping themes were most fully demonstrated in his next works and in particular in his historico-revolutionary epic *SIBERIA* (1976).

A kind and modest man as well as a superb organiser who is deeply concerned with the development of the whole of modern Soviet literature, Georgi Markov has never, as his works show, lost his links with his native Siberia, whose living juices feed his work. Georgi Markov has expressed his gratitude to the village in which he was born in a most original way: the Lenin Prize he was awarded for his epic novel *SIBERIA* he gave for the construction of a new library in the village. The new library, which will house 25,000 volumes, will, as does every library, of course, reserve a place of honour for Georgi Markov's own books.

Ivan Yegorych's Land

1

The lights stayed on until late that night in the Teplovskoye District Party Committee. Ivan Yegorych Krylov, the First Secretary, was being feted on his retirement. Ivan Yegorych had lived his whole life in the Teplovskoye district, and of his sixty-three years he had spent only four away. That was during the war against nazism. Many had gone away then. And many never returned. Many.

Ivan Yegorych, however, was lucky. He arrived home unscathed from the front. Some people even found this hard to believe: the man had never for a moment been away from the front line and not only had he not been killed, he had not even been wounded.

"I live a charmed life, friends," Ivan Yegorych joked, his medals tinkling on his chest. "The bullets avoided me like the plague."

"You're a lucky man, Ivan; you made it through the war and you're lucky in your work too. Some get reprimands, but you get rewards," the secretaries of other districts said to Krylov when the Teplovskoye district was listed in the first lines of all the regional data sheets, a position which it held firmly.

He was reminded of all these things at the farewell party in the meeting room of the new detached stone building which had recently come to decorate the wide and spacious square of the district centre.

Konstantin Alexeyevich Petrov, the First Secretary of the Regional Committee, had flown in by helicopter for the party. He was quite young—in fact, he could have been Krylov's son—but he had managed in the short time he had so far lived to graduate from an institute, to defend a thesis, to be director of a large factory, to head a town Party committee, and to spend two years driving about various districts as a Central Committee instructor. But to tell the truth, none of these things were what had earned him Ivan Yegorych's respect: his enthusiasm was what earned him that. Whenever any practical question was being discussed and debated, he would not stop until the whole maze had been untangled down

to the last little knot. And if ever he gave his consent about a matter or expressed his approval of something, then you could be sure he would not forget his words! Within the week, Petrov's young bass would come down the telephone line: "You haven't forgotten our little talk, have you, Ivan Yegorych? You're not taking things too slowly, are you? Have you got hold of the daring, initiative people you need?"

But Ivan Yegorych was also not one to drag things out: he had of course not forgotten their talk, had not taken things slowly, and he had found enthusiastic, energetic people....

Petrov spoke briefly at the farewell party, neither at the beginning nor at the end, but somewhere in between the speeches by the state farm managers and collective farm chairmen.

"You're a lucky man, Ivan Yegorych," he said. "And I hope your successor will be the same. At the Regional Committee, we never worried about the Teplovskoye district. We knew that the Teplovians would always cope with the plan and give a little bit over it besides. So, rest now, Ivan Yegorych, rest to your heart's content! You've worked and fought in the war admirably. We're sorry to have to let you go. No one has a bad word to say about you. You've earned your right to rest!"

Ivan Yegorych listened to his colleagues' speeches, feeling as if they were talking about someone else, as if they were having a farewell party for some other soon-to-be pensioner. When the Second Secretary of the District Committee, who was acting master of ceremonies for the evening, gave the floor to Ivan Yegorych, the latter was lost. He stood in silence for nearly a minute, smoothing with his palm the grey hair falling over his domed forehead and cautiously stealing glances at the room which was filled to bursting with people whom he had known for years, the majority of them even for decades.

"Well, first I'd like to thank you for all the kind things you've said," said Ivan Yegorych and fell silent again as he chose his words. "And I must say you really are good at singing praises! Nightingales, the lot of you!... Ivan Yegorych is this... Ivan Yegorych is that.... Samokhvalov over there almost shed a tear.... But perhaps, Fyodor Fyodorych, it was a tear of joy: thank God, you're saying to yourself, the old man's not going to get me out of bed at dawn any more...."

Loud laughter greeted this in the room and someone shouted: "It was from love, Ivan Yegorych! You always showed such concern for his state farm!"

"Thank you, thank you... I'm not blaming you in any way, Fyodor Fyodorych.... Thank you for today and for all you've done in the past. I remember how you flayed me at every conference: 'The District Committee overlooked... the First Secretary did not attend to....' I won't hide that you were not let off the hook either. Don't take it that this was in revenge for your criticism. No. It's because we must demand a lot of one another. We're Bolsheviks, after all, and not blushing maidens to think only of sweet words, to have no demands made of you, to be allowed to go your own way without bearing responsibility.... We've had to use a sharp word or two at times. Thank you once again for your efforts, my friends and brothers.... I wish you many successes and hope... hope that the Teplovskoye district will continue always to lead the table...."

And though Ivan Yegorych had got a firm grip on himself, though he was being as hard on himself as he could, his voice at this point trembled and his eyes grew moist; afraid that he might break down altogether, he gave a wave of his hand and hurriedly brought his speech to an end.

"Live long and happy lives, mothers and fathers, and do good for others."

They clapped Ivan Yegorych until their hands hurt. No one in the room was unmoved. He had played a by no means unimportant role in the lives of many of the people sitting there: he had sent them to study, appointed them to their jobs, praised them for their successes, dressed them down for their omissions, advised them, instructed them, and rushed to their aid whenever he was needed, which was almost constantly.

2

It was the fifth day of his new life.

Ivan Yegorych woke up at some internal urging that had become a habit. A pale dawn was peeping in through the curtained window. The old grandfather clock was ticking away and creaking gently. The slightly astringent smell of hemp ready for cutting in the local gardens blew in through

the open window. The early birds were fluttering about and chirruping in the front garden while the light wind was playing with loose shingles on the roof.

“Overslept!” Ivan Yegorych whispered as he leapt out of bed and grabbed his clothes. “Why hasn’t that Kuzma hooted from outside? Or is he also luxuriating in bed like me?”

Ivan Yegorych clambered hurriedly into his trousers and pulled on his shirt. “What are you rushing for as if there were a house on fire?!” A cold shiver suddenly ran down his spine. “Your days of going out to inspect the fields and lands are over. This has fallen to someone else’s lot now.” Without taking off either his trousers or his shirt, Ivan Yegorych plumped back into bed. He recalled the parting words of the First Secretary of the Regional Committee: “Rest to your heart’s content.” The word “rest” unconsciously snow-balled in Ivan Yegorych’s brain, until it throbbed: “Rest... rest... rest... rest....”

Ivan Yegorych tossed and turned but the word would not go away. He got up once more and smoked a cigarette.

After that he could not get to sleep again even though he cuddled down on his pillow and forced himself to think about nothing.

Ivan Yegorych washed quickly, as was his habit, but, on reaching the kitchen table where there was an electric ring, a white enamel kettle, and a frying pan, he remembered he had nowhere to hurry to.

He liked a good meal in the mornings. The day ahead could be full of work and worries. It was a lucky day if he found a free thirty or forty minutes in which to dash to a consumer union’s tea room in whose cramped premises he could sup a bowl of cabbage soup and eat a rissole with some mustard on it. And what if, as frequently happened, a storm of urgent meetings, telephone calls, and pressing questions unleashed itself on the District Committee? On days like that, it wasn’t just lunch but even smoking that one had to forget.

Ivan Yegorych fried himself a couple of eggs in bacon fat and kept looking at the telephone. Would it ring? Would someone remember him, Ivan Yegorych, the man who had worked for fourteen whole years as First Secretary of the District Committee?

He very much wanted to have a chat with someone. The silence in his house was oppressive. And this became even

worse at the thought that in an hour, in a day, in a week, his life would be going on just the same—without hurry, with nothing to do, in solitude.

But just when Ivan Yegorych was thinking of the long life ahead, his bad heart made its presence felt by suddenly thumping in his chest. He opened the medicine cupboard and took a nitroglycerine tablet. He closed his eyes and leant against the window frame while waiting for it to take effect.

The telephone gave a long ring. Ivan Yegorych forgot the pain in his heart, dashed across the room, grabbed the receiver, and held it to his ear.

“Hello? Ivan Yegorych?” Samokhvalov’s voice said over the hissing and crackling. “Well, how are things in your new post of recipient of a special republican pension? Good, I hope! Look, I’m phoning you because a bear did for one of our cows. Well, we had to put her down. My driver’ll bring in some fresh meat for you. Don’t judge us too severely and please take it.”

“Thank you, Fedya. Not so much for the meat as for remembering me... and phoning.... How are things with you? Why did you let the cow get hurt by a bear?”

The telephone gave a crackle and Samokhvalov’s voice disappeared. Ivan Yegorych did not put down the receiver for nearly a minute and kept saying, “Hello, Podtayezhnoye, hello!” The connection, however, remained cut and, like it or not, he had to put the receiver back on the hook.

Whether it was from his medicine or the talk with Fyodor Fyodorych, Ivan Yegorych felt better: the pain in his heart had not come back and his breath was coming easily. He cleared the table in the new, unhurried rhythm he had decided to learn and use at all times.

“Just you try to understand Samokhvalov! He phoned. He cares.... Yet he of all the directors was the one I had the most run-ins with.... On the question of specialising the farms, he once accused me of leftism, of wanting to get ahead at any cost.... And sometimes I thought: no, there’s more to Samokhvalov doing all this than meets the eye, he must be nursing the idea over taking over my position as First Secretary. But now it turns out that I suspected him unjustly.... He reacted well to Chistyakov’s candidature and supported him at the election.”

Ivan Yegorych pondered without for that ceasing to tidy up.

He had a two-room flat but he used the second room only rarely since his wife had died.

To be quite frank, Ivan Yegorych's flat was by no means the best that could be found in the district centre but he was in no hurry to move.

"Now, Zina," he had said many times to his wife, "we'll rehouse all the specialists and machine operators in the new brick houses, and then it'll be our turn together with the executive committee chairman (who occupied the other half of their old log house). We are all right where we are. Others live a deal worse."

Zinaida had not objected and had waited. Not long enough, though. True, she had moved, but not to a new flat—to another world, as the poet said.

Ivan Yegorych swept the floor with a fir brush, scooped the dust into the metal stove, and stopped, undecided about what to do next. Everything was neat and tidy in the house and the rain had worked in the vegetable garden overnight. His lunch and his supper were in the fridge—the day before, the women from the tea room had heard about his retirement and brought him a roast goose, a jug of kvass, and a cake with "To I. Y. Krylov with best wishes" written on it in chocolate cream as a present. Enough food to last a single eater a week.

Ivan Yegorych stood for a while and then went into the other room. Zinaida's dresses in the glass-fronted wardrobe caught his eye. They hung on plastic coat-hangers and through the glass the flowers on the materials looked as fresh as fresh could be and so natural they might just have been brought in from the garden. Zinaida had always liked bright and eye-catching materials and, to do her justice, she had had good taste. The strident colours had suited the bright eyes, crimson lips, and rosy cheeks which had made her face younger even late in her life.

"Ah, Zina, Zina, you left me too soon," Ivan Yegorych whispered as he looked around the room. It still retained the cosiness that a woman's hands can give a place. He suddenly wanted to touch Zinaida's dresses. He opened the wardrobe and, taking the sleeve of one of them, held it for a long time pressed to his chest.

"I think I'll go and visit her where she is resting for ever," Ivan Yegorych decided.

Say what you like about our ancestors—good or bad—but they did know how to choose sites for public buildings. If they were building a church, then they chose either a hill, so that it should be visible from all around, or else an open field, once again so that people should be able to see it from anywhere. If they were making a bridge across a river, then they found a stretch where the banks sloped conveniently, where they were close to one another, and where there was a view and the bridge could be seen from afar. A bridge like that, on high larch posts, with handrails and a floor of solid timbers, could not but impress the inhabitants of a village. What about the school? It was invariably allocated a plot in the middle of the village, apart from the other houses so that the approaches to it should be free and nothing could block the view from its wide, unvillagelike windows. And here was the cemetery. For it they would choose a plot of land which nature herself somehow contrived to paint the colour of sadness and grief.

As he thought about this, Ivan Yegorych stopped before the cemetery's birch grove. They were unusual silver birches indeed. Tall, and with thick trunks, they stood quietly and wordlessly, their crowns inclined in a gentle bow. The silver birches' branches also grew in an extremely strange way: they hung like plats, weakly and sadly. The trees exuded such an air of grief that his heart ached.

"They stand there as if they understood the whole misery of human bereavements," thought Ivan Yegorych as he walked to the gates and then to his wife's grave in the farthest corner of the cemetery. The grass had grown over the grave but he could still easily read the golden letters of the inscription on the grey gravestone through it: "Zinaida Spiridonovna Krylova. 1914-1973."

"Well, hello, Zina, hello.... I've come to tell you that I'm a pensioner now.... You remember how you and I used to wonder what we would do then.... We wanted to study the history of the district.... To go to Moscow, so as to see the capital at our ease for once, and to bring our grandson here, to show him our land.... There was a lot we wanted to do and never had time for," Ivan Yegorych spoke in his thoughts with his wife as he leant on the iron fence which the workers

of the local workshop had made to surround Zinaida's grave.

Ivan Yegorych pulled up the grass which was getting in the way of the inscription and stood for a few minutes more over the grave. Then, having replaced the wire ring which kept the gate in the fence closed, he walked away across the cemetery, now and then glancing back and mentally saying good-bye to Zinaida.

As he meandered his way between fresh mounds and others that had already sunk and become overgrown with weeds, between rotting wooden fences and tumble-down crosses, Ivan Yegorych became very displeased with himself, with his own forgetfulness. On the very day of Zinaida's death, he had gone to the cemetery to choose a place for the grave and had noticed how run-down the place was. The cemetery was surrounded by a three-rail fence and in places the pickets holding this up had rotted through, broken, or sagged so badly that the fence lay practically on the ground. Pigs and calves wandered about freely, looking for shade, while the old horse belonging to the district consumer union's bakery dozed under the canopy of the birches.

Ivan Yegorych had decided then that he would telephone the chairman of the village Soviet's Executive Committee and make him blush for such a disgrace. But he had not made that call. He had got caught up in the rush of business that dogged the steps of the secretary of the District Committee.

"I'll phone now and put Pechenkin to shame: you bureaucrat, I'll say, you don't visit the places you are duty-bound to visit. Educating the new man, my friend, presupposes teaching him to respect the past, to remember those who are no longer with us." So thought Ivan Yegorych, annoyed by the mess in the cemetery and slightly vexed by the fact that he had done nothing about it three months earlier.

4

Ivan Yegorych was already nearing his house when Senya the postman, secretary of the local post office's Komsomol organisation, a correspondence course student of the Literary Institute, and a frequent contributor to the district newspaper's columns where he published poems from his cycle *The New Face of the Teplovskoye Countryside*, came running after him.

“Comrade Krylov! Ivan Yegorych!” Senya’s voice rang all down the street.

Ivan Yegorych failed at first to understand where the voice was coming from. He was walking past the four-storeyed houses which the Selkhoztekhnika depot had recently built, and it seemed to him as if he was being called to from one of the upper storeys. He stopped and looked up questioningly at the open windows. It was then that Senya caught up with him.

“I was actually on my way to your place, Ivan Yegorych,” said Senya, shaking the luxuriant head of hair which he treasured like the apple of his eye, considering it an indispensable appurtenance of his poetic talent. “A letter came for you. By registered airmail. Judging from the return address, it must be from Victor Ivanych. Sign here, please.”

Senya opened a thick, loose-leaf book and gave Ivan Yegorych the letter and a pencil. Having obtained his signature, Senya dashed off. Yes. It was a letter from Victor. Ivan Yegorych would easily recognise that large, readable, and seemingly drawn handwriting amongst a thousand others.

He wanted to tear the envelope open on the spot and read the letter. Ivan Yegorych patted his pockets—he did not have his glasses with him and without them he could only read by holding things out at arm’s length. “Unseemly. People will see me and think that Krylov has turned into an old man,” Ivan Yegorych thought and hurried home.

“I wonder what Victor has to say.... I bet it’s to ask me to go and live with him again, another attempt to persuade me.... But how am I to leave here? Does he think it’s easy? I’ve been here for so long.... Wherever I look, it’s home.... And her grave’s here, too....”

He climbed up onto the porch and stopped, feeling short of breath. His heart beat like a hammer against his ribs. “Overdid it a little,” Ivan Yegorych whispered and sat down on the steps to rest. He didn’t stay for long, though: he hadn’t the patience.

After a minute or so he stood up, hurried into the house, and, having adjusted his glasses on his nose, settled himself comfortably at the table in the corner with the intention of reading the letter without hurrying, pondering over every word in it.

Ivan Yegorych had of course been right in his suppositions as to the contents of the letter.

"Dear father," his son wrote, "I hope that you are now retired. How's life? Are you fed up with your 'well-earned rest' yet? Knowing you, I'm sure that you're going crazy with nothing to do, all by yourself. So once again I'll say what I've said many times before: come to us. Victor junior is longing to see you. Nina's writing separately. She would also like you to come and live with us permanently. And don't think bad things of us: we won't try to turn you into a household help. Get well again and if you want to work, we won't say a word against it. Although our town's a small one, it's growing fast and people are needed here as nowhere else. Especially experienced people. So come! Please try to understand that things will be better for you here, and calmer. The same applies to us. We worry every day about how you are out there. Are you well? Do you feel happy? I'm doing all right at work. You can congratulate me on my promotion to major! So now that I've overtaken you, comrade captain, obey the marching orders I am giving you and come and live here!"

Under this letter came Victor junior's scribbles and the message: "Grandpa, when you come to us, please bring a Siberian squirrel with you." There was also a note from his daughter-in-law on a separate sheet of paper.

"Dear, kind Ivan Yegorych, Victor has written all that we think about your life. I just want to add from myself that you should move in with us without a second thought! I love you and respect you as a person with a big heart. In the hardest years of my childhood you not only took me in but together with Zinaida Spiridonovna actually became my parents for me. Furthermore, it was in your house, in your family, that I found my happiness: Victor. Isn't that enough for me to be eternally grateful to you? Please come to us and don't let doubts gnaw at you. I'm sure that you will be pleased both with me and with little Victor, not to mention Victor senior—he's your son and his heart is always with you."

Ivan Yegorych read the letter through and then re-read it. Tears welled up in his eyes. "They love me. If they didn't, they wouldn't ask me so insistently to move in with them. But they only simplify the matter. 'Come to us!' Easier said than done! It frightens me to think.... I've lived in Siberia my whole life long—and suddenly the Transcarpathians... Ah,

Victor, Victor, how wonderful everything would have been if your life had gone differently.... Why on earth did you go and become a military man instead of an agriculturist.... You'd now be an agronomist or livestock expert on one of the state farms round here.... In fact, with your brains, you could hold the director's reins ably.... You could even make a place for yourself in the district committee.... Take Arkady Chistyakov, for example: he's only two years older than you and look at the trust shown him—elected first secretary....”

Ivan Yegorych stood up, wiped the dew from his glasses, paced up and down the room, and took the letter again. He wanted to read it once more but put it aside.

“I must think,” he said out loud, “I must think hard about this. Victor became a soldier because of me. Can I really be called just an agriculturist? He grew up on my stories about the front.... My medals inflamed his imagination.... But what's done is done and you can't change it. Someone's got to guard the frontier....” Ivan Yegorych sighed and put the letter into his jacket pocket in order to have it with him. “They're very sweet, very sweet,” Ivan Yegorych thought as he picked up the telephone receiver.

“Natasha, hello. Put me through to Pechenkin, will you?” Ivan Yegorych could put a name to the voices of all the switchboard operators. He grew more serious as he waited for Pechenkin to reply. The chairman of the executive committee of the village Soviet did not reply at once, and when he did so it was in a displeased tone.

“Good morning, Timofei Andreich, good morning. Krylov here. What are you unhappy about, what's got you so annoyed? Quarrelled with your wife, have you? Give in, friend, give in. One should value women. And your Maria Karpovna is worthy of respect, too. A beauty and an excellent worker. She's made a great thing of that service centre of hers. The other districts are all green with jealousy.... No, you say? I've got it wrong, you mean? What's the matter, then? Ah, I see! The village herdsman got drunk and allowed the state farm's wheat to be trampled. He should be called to strict account. What would I do? The same as you: deduct the value of the trampled wheat from his pay, record an official reprimand at the executive committee and make it public, so that everyone knows. You say the cattle are in good condition? Well then, if they're still like that

come winter, you can cancel the reprimand, announce official gratitude, and give him a bonus. Explain his prospects to him, though, explain them properly, so that he doesn't start thinking that everyone has given up on him because of one mistake. That would be best, don't you think, Timofei Andreich? And now, here's what I wanted to say to you: when did you last visit the cemetery? When you buried your mother-in-law? Yes. I remember: that was three years ago, wasn't it? Even four. See how time flies.... Well, do me a favour and go round as soon as you can to have a look at how our departed toilers are resting, whether everything's all right. The departed, my friend, need nothing from us but we can't do without them. Because they are our roots, Timofei Andreich, yes, our roots. They made our country's glory. You and I, we're grass, the leaves on the branches. The roots are strong and solid and so we are in flower, ripening fruit. Go take a look. Phone me afterwards and tell me what you think. You know, of course, that I'm asking you as a comrade. I can't give orders any more, that's Chistyakov's prerogative now.... Help him, he's a young man, energetic and with his fair share of brains.... So ring me, and don't be angry that I took you away from other matters."

Ivan Yegorych put down the receiver, feeling that he had done his duty, and lay down on the sofa. He felt like lying, resting, and thinking—thinking hard—about what to do next.

5

What was he to do next? Ivan Yegorych was given no peace by his constant pondering over whether to go or not. Sometimes anguish made his heart ache and he would decide that yes, he would go. But Ivan Yegorych only had to imagine a certain scene to himself for a moment in order for his doubts to come back to him undiminished. He imagined the scene like this: he walks timidly in to see Chistyakov in his own former office. He speaks quietly, not having the energy to speak louder.

"I'm leaving, Arkady. Take me off the books. My son, grandson, and daughter-in-law want me to live with them. They're promising me an easy and tranquil life."

Chistyakov's smiling and unwrinkled face with its heavy

eyebrows becomes gloomy and, looking sadly at Ivan Yegorych, he whispers in despair:

“Ivan Yegorych, I can’t believe, I can’t believe what you’re saying! Do you know what you’re doing! You’re shoving a knife right into the district committee’s very heart. Now I’d better not show myself in the region or appear before the activists. The cry will make the round of the districts: ‘Have you heard about their concern for veterans in Teplovskoye? Even the former First Secretary went off somewhere as soon as he retired. That Chistyakov is evidently an upstart—less than a week in the First Secretary’s office and he’s tossing people about as if they were no more valuable than sunflower seeds. It’s a crying shame!’”

Ivan Yegorych could not be sure that precisely those words would be used, but that words to that effect would be spoken—that he did not doubt for an instant. He also thought about something else: “Are you really so old and weak that you have to leave Teplovskoye just to be with your son and grandson? It was too taxing on your health to be First Secretary with that worn-out heart of yours. It was fair that you should have been allowed to retire. But what about taking some easier job? You’ll manage, you’ll manage all right. People decay from having nothing to do and no responsibilities. Doing what work one can keeps a man young and on his toes. There’s been quite a bit in the papers and magazines about that. *Pravda* even reported one academician as saying that ‘active work is the way to a long life’.”

It is quite likely that Ivan Yegorych would have taken precisely that view about his future life had it not been for Victor and Nina. They wrote to him more and more frequently, and the tone of these letters became more and more impatient: “When are you moving? We’re waiting. We’re waiting.”

Ivan Yegorych sent a telegram in reply: “DEAREST VICTOR AND NINA COMMA MY HEALTH NORMAL COMMA FEELING FINE STOP PROBLEM RAISED BY YOU NOT SIMPLE COLON AM THINKING COMMA WILL DISCUSS MATTER WITH COMRADES COMMA WILL INFORM YOU STOP HUGS AND KISSES BOTH OF YOU AND LITTLE VICTOR STOP FATHER”.

Ivan Yegorych had written "will discuss matter with comrades" in all honesty but he understood this in his own way. He considered it to be early days yet to speak with any of the district's functionaries, being sure that he would get no support on this subject, no matter to whom he went.

Samokhvalov (the director of the Podtayezhny State Farm) would as usual reply roughly and directly: "What's the matter with you, Ivan Yegorych? Off to join the philistines? I don't think that you have the moral right to leave. You might at least wait for the first results from the specialisation of the state farms to come in. After all, you yourself pressed the directors mercilessly. Or are you afraid that the experiment will prove unsuccessful? And even if it's successful, why don't you wait a year or two and rejoice in the results with us? You'll still have time to sit with your grandson by the window afterwards."

The timid, quiet-spoken Executive Committee Chairman Peregudov, although exhausted by his stomach ulcer and his constant worrying about pastures, fodder stocks, roads and so on, would probably repeat what he had said earlier: "It's good to have you as a neighbour, Ivan Yegorych. When problems press me, I can run to you as always for advice. Chistyakov has, of course, read a very large number of books. I hear that a post-graduate has to read sixty thousand pages at that Academy of Social Sciences in Moscow. Isn't that something! But all the same, reading on its own does not give one wisdom. Theory must be tested in practice. And what kind of practice has Chistyakov had? None worth speaking of! So don't get angry, Ivan Yegorych, if I keep on coming to see you once in a while."

Serafim Prokopievich Metelkin, the head of the district education department and a man used to "gypping" the state and collective farms of everything that caught his eye for his schools, would express himself in even surer terms: "Ivan Yegorych, please, I beg you, wait. The building of schools and their furnishing has not yet been completed. Don't think I'm abusing you if I ask you to phone the district consumer union: let them as a sign of goodwill towards the education of its members' children provide us with an order for five thousand bricks. A little call to the logging camp might help

us get 300 cubic metres of sawn timber. And you know, I hear that there's an unwanted motor standing in the central village of Samokhvalov's state farm. It doesn't matter that you're no longer First Secretary, doesn't matter at all. You will always have authority and they will do as you ask. They're our own children after all, not strangers. I hope the sun always shines on them, Ivan Yegorych."

And what about the district procurator? The district military commissar? The chairmen of the collective farms? Not from any one of these could Ivan Yegorych get sympathy for any plans to leave. They would all be against it as they were all sure that although Ivan Yegorych had retired, his experience, his understanding of people, of events, and of things would remain as not his personal but the collective moral capital of the Party organisation.

And yet Ivan Yegorych's significant statement in his telegram to his son and daughter-in-law that he would "discuss the matter with his comrades" had not been empty words.

He did have such comrades. True, they were no longer among the living and only their names and his memories of them—firm, constant, and never for one moment fading—existed. In times of difficulty Ivan Yegorych frequently turned in his mind to them, to his comrades, for help and support....

7

...There was a large mound by the roadside on the way in to Teplovskoye from the main road. Certain knowledgeable people asserted that it was a burial mound left over from the distant past and that later it was robbed, as witnessed to by the deep ditches, like wartime trenches, on it.

Whether this was true or not, no one knew for sure, but the ditches, when seen from the mainroad, certainly did look as if they had been made for a purpose. Following them, it was easy to walk up to the very top of the mound, where there was a flat area measuring about a hectare.

It was that platform that Ivan Yegorych remembered when the Teplovskoye district began to prepare in 1965 for the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the victory over fascism.

Having taken a careful look at the mound back then, Ivan Yegorych put forward for the District Party Committee bureau's consideration a proposal that a memorial to the soldiers and officers who gave their lives in the Great Patriotic War should be erected there. Of course, the district could not manage anything large—such as the monument put up in the regional centre's main square. They had neither the funds nor the capacity to do that. Ivan Yegorych set out a far more modest task: in the middle of the platform to put up a statue of a soldier holding his helmet in one hand and a lowered standard in the other and to the right of this to lay two metal slabs to look like the pages of an open book with the names of all the killed Teplovians.

One complication which Ivan Yegorych would not even have dreamed of came up just when the workers had finished casting the metal slabs. An instructor from the Regional Party Committee called Kozlov happened to be visiting the Teplovskoye district and he expressed doubts about the district committee's whole plan. "Listing all those who died by name," the instructor wrote in a report to the regional committee, "means that it cannot be guaranteed that the names of people who displayed a lack of preparedness, faint-heartedness, or simply cowardice will be excluded from the roll of honour. Can it be permitted that we should engrave in the popular memory the names of unworthy people by mixing them with the names of real heroes?" The instructor insisted that measures be taken before the plan had been realised.

Ivan Yegorych did not like swearing and his strongest curse was the harmless exclamation, "Oh, plague and pestilence!", but on this occasion he lost his temper. When the head of the Party organisational work department of the regional committee telephoned him and asked what he thought of the instructor's ideas, Ivan Yegorych let loose such a volley of obscenities that state farm director Fyodor Fyodorych Samokhvalov, who was sitting in his office at the time and had commanded an artillery regiment during the war, broke into a pleased smile.

"Spoken like a front-liner, Ivan Yegorych!" he said. "I didn't know you were still up to it. Ah, that takes me back to the days when I used to order the regiment to fire at

point-blank range.” He gave a wild wave of his hand and snapped his fingers.

Ivan Yegorych flew to the Regional Party Committee that same day and his even voice, like the burring of a bumble-bee, was to be heard in one office after another there.

“What’s the matter with you, my friends? Are you out of your right minds to take such absurd ideas seriously?! Comrade Kozlov is a typical conformist coward. The memorial is above all to pay tribute to all—that is to say to the people. We’re not ones to forget our own—and in remembering everyone, we are remembering each individual. Each and ever-rr-ry one! And we will name each and every person who laid down his life for his country. It is our duty to do so and a matter of conscience....”

The regional committee agreed with Ivan Yegorych. Moreover, it recommended Teplovskoye’s example to all the districts in the region. And ever since the unveiling of the memorial on Victory Day before a large gathering of people from Teplovskoye and the neighbouring villages, no other spot held such attractions for Ivan Yegorych. He went there on holidays, on important personal dates, and on just any day if he felt like it.

8

Now, too, Ivan Yegorych was sitting on the bench facing the metal book of honour and unhurriedly reading the list of the dead.

“Sinelnikov, Gleb Danilovich, political instructor,” Ivan Yegorych formed the words with his lips and squinted in the bright August sunlight which towards evening changed from an unbearably hot yellow colour to a bright raspberry red. “Gleb Sinelnikov, a handsome lad, a good singer and an excellent sportsman, worked as secretary of the Teplovskoye District Committee of the Komsomol before joining the army...” Ivan Yegorych recalled. Ivan Yegorych had been five or so years older than Sinelnikov but had nevertheless learnt a good deal from the lad. There was no telling how many books Sinelnikov had read, how hard he had worked at educating himself! It was none other than Sinelnikov who had persuaded Ivan Yegorych to read some of the works of the leading Russian naturalists—Timiryazev, Michurin, Vilyams.

It is possible that this reading determined Ivan Yegorych's whole life: he became an agriculturist, a lover of the land and a builder of the new countryside.

"Rusakov, Pavel Yevseyevich, major," Ivan Yegorych whispered and remembered one of the most extraordinary people he had ever met before or since. Pavel Yevseyevich was born in the family of a farm labourer and experienced that life for himself. At the age of fourteen, he already fought in a partisan detachment. At sixteen he joined the Party. He next organised several collective farms. When the machine-and-tractor station was set up in the Teplovskoye district, Rusakov became its director. Regrettably, Pavel Yevseyevich remained barely literate all his life but he had enough brains and energy for ten ordinary men and contributed greatly to the development of the collective farms. Not for nothing was one named after him. And bore the name proudly. Ivan Yegorych had energetically supported the wishes of Rusakov's fellow-villagers when they had placed their suggestion before the district committee.

"Kopylov, Vladimir Mikhailovich, senior lieutenant," whispered Ivan Yegorych and got up to stand for a minute or so over the metal plates.... Vladimir Kopylov had been Ivan Yegorych's best friend. They had spent their childhood together and had together gone off to the front. Volodya had been deputy commander for political affairs in the battalion headed by Ivan Yegorych. He had been killed during a battle one month before the end of the war. Dying in the arms of the battalion commander, he had asked his friend not to forget his daughter Nina, who, since his wife had already died, would now be an orphan. Kopylov had before the war worked as an agronomist in a collective farm and, as a correspondence course student, had graduated from the Timiryazev Academy of Agricultural Sciences....

Ivan Yegorych had carried out his friend's last wish. Nina, after her mother's death, lived with strangers, whose children she looked after. Ivan Yegorych found Nina in a nearby village and brought her home. Zinaida took her in as if she were her own daughter. Up until their penultimate year at school, Victor, the Krylovs' own son, and Nina had lived as brother and sister but then they suddenly took a dislike to each other and began finding everything that the other did unbearable. The Krylovs did their best to reconcile them but

to no avail. Only after Nina had gone to study at a medical institute and Victor had entered military college did everything become clear. The supposed incompatibility had disguised the love that had flared up between them.

Ivan Yegorych would never forget the day when a telegram had come for them from Tomsk. It had dumbfounded both him and Zinaida by its unexpectedness. "Dearest Mummy and Daddy, Nina and I were today married at the registry office and are now man and wife. We are both bursting with happiness. It turns out that we weren't quarelling at home but were in love. Love is quite a trickster and can come up with some strange stunts. We will come together for the holidays. Victor."

Having recalled all that, Ivan Yegorych picked an ox-eye daisy with blindingly white petals, went up to the book of honour, and placed the flower on the letters making up his friend's surname.

"And what would Vladimir advise me to do?" Ivan Yegorych wondered and immediately answered himself: "He always dreamed of returning to his native parts and of raising record crops there. He'd say, looking me in the eyes as he always did, 'You'll die of homesickness there, Ivan. We tramped across half of Europe together but did you see any place more beautiful than our Teplovskoye?'"

Ivan Yegorych returned unhurriedly to the bench. And again his eyes ran over the iron pages of the book of honour.

"Sakharova, Klavdiya Vasilyevna, military doctor, 3rd class," Ivan Yegorych read and suddenly, as if returning from the dead, she appeared in his mind's eye. She was the same age as Zinaida, her friend and at the same time her rival. She loved him, Ivan. And he loved her. And all their friends and comrades believed that the matter of their marrying was settled—they would marry for sure.

Zinaida was not as attractive as Klavdiya: Klavdiya was tall, shapely, blue-eyed, with a measured walk and restrained but expressive gestures—not a woman but a princess. Zinaida was Klavdiya's opposite in everything: of middling height, thin, and hurried. Her speech was like the chatter of a machine-gun. The only thing that everyone allowed was that her eyes were unbeatable. No matter what you compared them with, you hit the nail on the head. Like lakes? Certainly. Like searchlights? Also. Furthermore, the colour of her eyes

was strikingly variable: they were sometimes dark grey and cold—a look that could cut like a knife; sometimes green, eager, wild, and brimming over with merriness—you could not help but smile back when they were like that.

The characters of the women who loved Ivan Yegorych did not coincide either. Though she always seemed to be of rushing, Zinaida never hurried in anything. She weighed her decisions and spoke only about what she had thought over. Her judgements were always backed by irrefutable logic. It was perhaps these qualities that made her into the talented teacher she was. She gave almost forty years of her life to that profession and ended up in the responsible and worrisome position of director of a secondary school.

Meanwhile Klavdiya was an excitable person and was easily carried away. Frequently, having done something, she would regret it and reproach herself until her next equally ill-considered action.

Having given Ivan Yegorych her word that she would marry him after completing her third year at the medical institute, Klavdiya when already in her second year became involved with a middle-aged assistant professor, brought about his divorce, and wrote Ivan Yegorych a letter in which she said: "Ivan, I'm a stupid fool! I'm going to marry a man twenty years older than myself. I feel that in breaking with you I'm losing my happiness but what can I do? I don't have the strength to stop myself. Forgive me and, if you can, don't think me base."

Three years went by and Klavdiya suddenly returned to Teplovskoye. She had come to take up permanent employment in the district hospital and had left her assistant professor for ever. When Klavdiya met Ivan Yegorych, who by then was already married to Zinaida, she told him that she loved him more than ever.

"Leave these little games alone, Klavdiya," Ivan Yegorych had said then. "I'm married and I don't intend to have an affair on the side with you."

"Nor do I, Ivan. I will love you from afar. Is that all right?"

"Believe what you like."

But she did love Ivan Yegorych. She did! No one knew that this was so except for Zinaida, and she, to be accurate, could only guess at it. She never mentioned it to Ivan Yegorych, however, because she was never given the slightest reason for

doing so. But although Klavdiya truly never gave any reason for complaint, Zinaida did not for that relax her vigilance. She would keep looking in Klavdiya's direction; with her character, she might get up to something that would leave you gaping afterwards!

Then the war broke out. Klavdiya, as a doctor, was conscriptable and on the first day of the mobilisation, she demanded that she be called up. She was called up.

She and Ivan Yegorych found themselves serving in the same division from the very beginning of their military service. In the hard frosts of 1941 the division took part in bloody battles near Volokolamsk.

Ivan Yegorych commanded a platoon. Klavdiya was sent to run one of the regiments' field hospitals. There was no question, of course, of them arranging to meet each other. But they never lost interest in each other either and sent each other greetings whenever the occasion—and these occasions could be most unexpected and strange—arose.

Then one day Ivan Yegorych read in the divisional newspaper an item about the heroism of the doctors and nurses of a field hospital that had been surrounded by the enemy. This stated briefly that "the Soviet medical personnel under the command of military doctor Sakharova fought the Hitlerites to the final cartridge. Every one of them was killed but they did not surrender to the enemy."

Many of Ivan Yegorych's comrades had fallen in battle by the time Klavdiya was killed, but no other left such a deep and eternally bleeding wound in his heart. "Now that Klavdiya's gone, I'll be next to die," Ivan Yegorych decided for some reason. But it was only an echo of his suffering and no more.

"I will remember you for ever, Klavdiya," Ivan Yegorych whispered and slowly transferred his gaze to other lines.

"Nedospasov, Nikolai Yefimovich, sergeant," Ivan Yegorych read out loud. "I remember, I remember," he went on to himself, "he was a tractor driver from the Komsomolets Collective Farm. A good man. A hard worker. One of the first in the district to learn to drive a tractor. He drove through the village and children ran screaming after him while the oldsters hugged the walls of their cottages."

"Neumelov, Savva Kondratyevich, private," Ivan Yegorych read out loud once again. "And I remember him, too," he

thought. "He was a team leader on the New Life Collective Farm. They grew good flax on their fields. He could do anything with his hands! And he wasn't just one of the crowd in the army, too. A sniper. The Hitlerites really caught it from him. He was killed, if I remember rightly, by mortar fire."

"Portnov, Sergei Grigoryevich, sergeant-major," Ivan Yegorych went on with his reading. "A teacher from Sosnovka and an amateur radio engineer," Ivan Yegorych recalled. He was the first man in the district to build himself a radio receiver and he called all his fellow villagers to come and listen to a broadcast. No one, of course, believed that one could hear a voice coming from a town thousands of kilometres away. The people nevertheless gathered in the school. Many were convinced that the teacher would make a fool of himself. A table was brought out and on it there was a box with weird bobbins wound with wire sticking out of it. The teacher climbed out onto the roof of the school and fixed a pole with a wire on it there. He climbed down again and touched the box. It gave a screech and a crackle and suddenly there came a loud, clear voice which said: "This is the Comintern Radio broadcasting from Moscow."

The crowd of men, women and children who had gathered there fled in every direction. Then a hysterical old woman yelled out to the whole village: "Good people! The end of the world has come... Our teacher is a devil, the Antichrist! Get him!" The crowd turned back and made for the teacher. The box was smashed into little pieces. Portnov saved himself in the school by bolting all the doors and windows. "What savagery! But how far we've got since then! And I saw and remember it all." Ivan Yegorych sat on and pondered.

The day was coming to a close. The raspberry-red sun went down in the forest somewhere just behind the village and a cool, honey-scented breeze rose from the fields. Ivan Yegorych, however, still did not leave the mound. There were, after all, three hundred names on the metal book of honour and each of them represented no just a personal story but a time which was now called history.

How could he just tear himself away from this land, leave it for somewhere else, forget these names for ever? His reason admitted that it was possible but his heart denied it and began to pound loudly and fiercely, painfully even, in his chest.

Translated by David Sinclair-Loutit

I. Yefremov

(b. 1907, village of Vyritsa,
near St. Petersburg—
d. 1972, Moscow)

For sheer learning, he could be compared with the thinkers of the Renaissance. Palaeontologist, geologist, Doctor of Biology, historian, author of thrilling adventure stories and a world-famous science-fiction writer—such is the range of his creative powers. It is therefore not difficult to understand why the message of his work was one of unlimited faith in the power of the human reason, a profound conviction that the bright forces of human nature would triumph in the end over the atavistic principles in man's conscious and subconscious mind.

Yefremov's science-fiction novels and stories, especially *ANDROMEDA* (1957), which has been translated into many foreign languages, are, above all, socio-philosophical novels. Their author believes that the mature, harmoniously developed reason does not exist solely on Earth, and that a time will come when rational beings of the whole Universe will come together and form what he calls "the era of the great ring".

He illustrates this profound conviction of his in a story, "Cor Serpentis" (1959), which tells how, in deep Space, astronauts from the Earth meet extraterrestrials who have arrived from an unknown galaxy. Unfortunately, they are unable to meet in the physical sense since for the extraterrestrials an oxygen-based atmosphere is lethal, but this obstacle only drives home the point that there is a unity of reason common to all higher beings who live by the laws of good, beauty and justice.

Cor Serpentis

The snow-white and the silvery spaceships hung as a single unit suspended in the infinity of space. *Telluris* switched on powerful heaters so that its crew could enter the gallery in their ordinary work suits—tight-fitting suits of blue wool.

A blue light such as one may see on high mountains on earth went on in the strangers' gallery. The transparent partitions at the junction of the differently illuminated galleries took on an aquamarine hue, like solidified pure sea water.

The deep silence in the earthmen's gallery was broken only by their excited breathing. Tay Eron brushed Afra's shoulder with his elbow and felt that the young woman was shivering. He drew her to himself and Afra cast up a swift grateful glance at him.

Eight strangers appeared at the far end of the connecting gallery. But were they strangers? The earthmen could hardly believe their eyes. Deep inside they had expected to see something unusual, something completely out of the ordinary. Now the likeness of the strangers to them seemed a miracle. But that was only at first glance. The more they looked the more differences they found in the parts not concealed by the dark clothes—short roomy jackets and long wide trousers resembling ancient terrestrial garments.

The blue light went out and the strangers turned on terrestrial lighting. The transparent partitions lost their green colour and became almost invisible. Behind the transparent wall stood people. It was hard to believe that they breathed what on earth was a poisonous gas and bathed in seas of corrosive hydrofluoric acid. They had proportionally built bodies and their height corresponded to that of the average earthman's. Their skin was of a strange cast-iron grey colour with a silvery hue and a hidden blood-red glitter such as one sees on polished hematite. The grey hue of this mineral was the same as the skin of the inhabitants from the fluorine planet.

Their round heads were covered with blue-black hair. But the most remarkable feature of their faces was the eyes. Very big and elongated, they occupied the whole breadth of the

face, slanting upwards to the temples, higher than the level of earthmen's eyes. The whites were of a deep turquoise colour and seemed disproportionally long in comparison with the black irises and pupils.

Their very black brows corresponded to the size and position of the eyes, joining with the hair high on the temples and almost meeting on the narrow bridge of the nose, forming an obtuse angle. Their hair slanted down both sides of the forehead to the temples in two clear straight lines symmetrical to the eyebrows, giving the forehead a lateral diamond shape. The nose was short and flat, the nostrils opened downwards, the same as terrestrial man's. The small mouth with purple lips revealed a row of even teeth of the same pure sky-blue as the whites of the eyes. The upper half of the face appeared very broad. It narrowed sharply from the level of the eyes ending in a slightly angular chin. What the ears were like the earthmen could not tell as all of the strangers wore a kind of golden braid passing from temple to temple over the crown of the head.

The group included men and women. The women were distinguished by longer necks, softer features and a luxuriant growth of bobbed hair. The men were taller, with more massive bodies and heavier chins—in short the differences between the sexes were along the same lines as with earthmen.

Afra thought the strangers' hands had only four fingers, the same size as human fingers, only apparently without joints because they bent smoothly without forming knuckles.

The feet could not be seen as they sank in the soft flooring of the gallery. In terrestrial light the clothes were dark brick-red in colour.

The more the earthmen looked at the strangers the less strange they appeared. More, they had a peculiar exotic beauty with their big eyes looking somberly and kindly at the earthmen, radiating wisdom and friendship.

"What eyes!" Afra exclaimed. "With such eyes it was easier to become men than with ours, though ours are fine too."

"Why so?" Tay asked in a whisper.

"Because the bigger the eye the greater the number of elements in the retina, hence the greater the number of details of the surrounding world which it can pick up."

Tay nodded comprehendingly.

One of the strangers stepped forward and made a gesture of invitation. The terrestrial lighting on the other side of the gallery went out.

"Oh," Moot Ang exclaimed in dismay, "I didn't think of this!"

"I did," said Kari, turning off the ordinary lighting and switching on two powerful lamps with No. 430 filters.

"We look like corpses," Taina said regretfully. "They won't think much of mankind in this light."

"Don't let that worry you," said Moot Ang. "Their spectrum of best visibility extends far to the violet end, maybe even into the ultraviolet. This suggests much greater warmth and more numerous hues than our vision provides, though I cannot imagine what actually they see."

"Probably we appear to them much yellower than we really are," Tay said after pausing to consider.

"Even that is better than this bluish corpse-like colour. Just look around," Taina persisted.

The earthmen took several photographs and placed the overtone sounder, operating on crystals of osmium, into a small transfer lock. The strangers received it at their end and set it up on a tripod. Kari directed the pencil of radio waves into the small bowl of the antenna. Terrestrial speech and music now sounded in the fluorine atmosphere of the strange spaceship. In the same way, the earthmen handed over an instrument with which they could determine the temperature, pressure and composition of the strange planet's atmosphere. As they had expected, the temperature inside the white spaceship was lower than terrestrial room temperature, being no greater than seven degrees. The pressure was greater than that of the terrestrial atmosphere, and the gravitational force was almost the same.

"They themselves are probably warmer," Afra said, "just as we are warmer than our habitual twenty-degree outside temperature. I should say their body warmth was about fourteen of our degrees Centigrade."

The strangers passed over their instruments enclosed in two netted boxes which gave no idea of their purpose. One of the boxes emitted high, pure intermittent sounds that seemed to dissolve in the distance. The earthmen guessed that the strangers heard higher notes than they did. If their hearing range was approximately analogous to that of the human ear it

would mean that they could not hear the bass tones of human speech and music.

The strangers turned on the terrestrial lighting, and the earthmen switched off the blue light. Two of the strangers, a man and a woman, approached the transparent partition. They calmly stripped their dark-red clothes and stood stock-still, holding hands. Then they turned slowly so that the earthmen could inspect their bodies, which resembled terrestrial human anatomy more than their faces. Their harmonious proportions fully corresponded to terrestrial conceptions of beauty. Somewhat sharper contours and sharper outlines of the convexities and hollows of their bodies created an impression of angularity, or rather, of more sharply chiselled forms. The impression was perhaps enhanced by their grey skin, darker in the folds and hollows.

Their heads were set attractively and proudly on long necks. The man had the broad shoulders of a person of labour and struggle, while the broad hips of the woman—mother of intelligent beings—in no way detracted from the feeling of intellectual power of the envoys from the unknown planet.

When the strangers stepped back with the familiar gesture of invitation and turned off the terrestrial lighting, the earthmen did not hesitate. At their commander's request, Tay Eron and Afra Devi took hands and stood in front of the transparent partition. In spite of the non-terrestrial lighting, which gave their bodies a cold hue of blue marble, the tellurian crew breathed a sigh of admiration, so apparent was the naked beauty of their companions. And the strangers too understood this. The vague shadows in the unlighted gallery could be seen to exchange glances and brief gestures whose meaning the earthmen could not comprehend.

Afra and Tay stood proudly and openly, filled with the nervous uplift that appears at times when difficult and hazardous tasks are in hand. When the strangers took all the pictures they wanted they turned on the light.

"Now I have not the slightest doubts that they know love," said Taina. "Genuine, beautiful, great human love—for their men and women are so beautiful and intelligent."

"You are quite right, Taina, and this is all the more cause for rejoicing as it means they will understand us in all things," Moot Ang said.

"That is so. Just look at Kari! Kari, don't fall in love with the fluorine girl—it could prove fatal!"

The astronavigator started and tore his gaze from the inhabitants of the white spaceship.

"I could, at that," he said with a melancholy smile. "I could, in spite of the difference between our bodies and the tremendous distances separating our planets. Only now have I understood the real power and strength of human love."

Now the strangers pushed forward a green screen on which small figures began to move. They walked in single file up a steep slope, carrying large objects on their backs. As each of the little figures reached the flat summit, it threw down its burden and dropped face down on the ground. The picture, like terrestrial animated cartoons, told of fatigue and the need for rest. The earthmen, too, felt how exhausted they were by the hours of waiting and the first impressions of the meeting. The inhabitants from the fluorine planet had evidently expected to meet other people and prepared for it by producing such "conversational" films, for example.

The crew of *Telluris* which was not ready for such a meeting found a way out of the difficulty. They moved a screen for quick sketches over to the partition, and Yass Teen, their artist, proceeded to pencil a sequence of drawings. First he drew tired little people, then a single big face with such an inquisitive expression that the strangers moved with animation, as they had when Tay Eron and Afra Devi had appeared. Then Yass Teen drew the Earth on its orbit around the sun, divided the orbit into twenty-four parts and shaded half of it. The strangers replied with a similar diagram. Metronoms were used to determine the duration of small time intervals and then compute the larger ones. Thus the astronauts found out that the fluorine planet makes one turn on its axis in approximately fourteen terrestrial hours and circles its blue sun in nine hundred days. The interval for rest which the strangers suggested equalled five terrestrial hours.

In a daze, the astronauts left the connecting gallery. The lights inside and outside were turned off and both spaceships lay side by side, dark and motionless, as though every living thing had perished in them, frozen in the terrific cold and black void of space.

However, inside surging, inquisitive, active life continued. The endlessly inventive human brain sought new means

whereby the knowledge and hopes bred by millennia of immeasurable toil, danger and sufferings could be transmitted to fellow intelligent beings born on planets of remote stars. Knowledge which had first freed man from the brute forces of nature, then from the dominion of cruel social systems, diseases and early senility, and finally elevated him to the fathomless heights of the universe.

The second meeting in the gallery began with a demonstration of stellar charts. The patterns of the constellations in this region of space were equally unfamiliar to the earthmen and the inhabitants of the fluorine planet. (Only when they returned to Earth did astronomers determine the exact location of the blue luminary: it lay in a small stellar cloud of the Milky Way in the proximity of Tau Ophiuchi.) The strange spaceship's path lay in the direction of a stellar cluster at the northern edge of Ophiuchus, and it crossed the path of *Telluris* at the southern boundary of the constellation Hercules.

In their gallery, the strangers set up a kind of grid the height of a man and made of reddish metal lamina. Something started spinning behind the lamina, which suddenly moved together, turned edgewise and disappeared from sight. In place of the grid there appeared a vast empty space with blinding blue globes of the fluorine planet's satellites spinning through it in the distance. Slowly the planet itself drew closer. A broad blue belt of opaque clouds girdled its equator. The planet's polar and subpolar zones glowed in greyish-reddish hues; the temperate zones were a pure white, like the strange spaceship's hull. Through a slight haze of vapour in the atmosphere one could see the vague contours of seas, continents and mountains extending in irregular vertical strips. The planet was larger than Earth and its fast rotation generated a powerful electric field around it. A purple glow extended in long wisps around the equator into the blackness of the surrounding space.

With bated breath the earthmen sat before the transparent partition for hour after hour, watching the startlingly realistic scenes of the fluorine planet which the unknown device unfolded before them. They saw the purple waves of the hydrofluoric ocean washing shores of black sands, red cliffs and the slopes of jagged mountains glimmering with a blue moonlight glow. Closer to the poles the surrounding air was

bluer, the dark-blue light of the purple star around which the fluorine planet revolved became deeper and purer.

The hills here rose in rounded cupolas, ridges and table mountains which gave off a bright opaline shine. A blue dusk lay in the deep valleys extending from the polar mountains to the scalloped fringe of the seas in the south. Opolescent tanks of blue clouds billowed over large bays. Huge structures of reddish metal and grassy-green stonework lined the seashores and extended endlessly along steep valleys leading to the poles. These vast clusters of buildings, visible from a tremendous height, were divided by broad bands of dense vegetation with greenish-blue foliage and punctuated by the flattened domes of hills that glowed from within like terrestrial opals or moonstone. The circular ice caps of frozen hydrogen fluoride on the poles were like precious gems of sapphire.

Dark- and light-blue, azure and purple were the dominant colours. The air itself seemed to be shot with a light-blue iridescence, like a weak discharge in a gas-filled tube. The world of the strange planet seemed cold and impassive, like a vision in a crystal ball: pure, distant, nebulous, a world lacking the warmth and caressing diversity of red, orange and yellow hues of the Earth.

The cities clung to the polar and temperate zones in both hemispheres. Closer to the equator the mountains became darker and more jagged. Sharp peaks stuck out of the sea, over which clouds of vapour billowed, mountain ridges extended latitudinally along the edges of the tropical regions. Blue vapours rose there in dense clouds: the heat of the blue star caused the volatile hydrogen fluoride to evaporate, saturating the atmosphere and building up huge banks of clouds along the fringes of the temperate zones, where it condensed and rained down in torrents that returned to the warm equatorial zone. Dams worthy of titans harnessed these mighty deluges, containing them in pipes and ducts, where they provided the energy for the planet's power plants.

Fields of huge quartz crystals shone brilliantly: evidently silicon played the part of our salt in the waters of the hydrofluorine sea.

The cities on the screen drew closer, their boundaries sharply defined in the cold blue light. As far as the eye could see, all the populated areas of the planet, lying outside the

mysterious equatorial region beneath its blue curtain of clouds, had been transformed, improved, adapted by the hands and creative mind of man. The planet was changed much more than our Earth, with its large nature preserves, ancient ruins and abandoned quarries.

The labour of countless generations of billions of people rose higher than the mountains, spreading over the fluorine planet's entire surface. Life dominated over the elemental turbulent waters and dense atmosphere permeated by lethally powerful rays from the blue star and tremendous electric charges.

The earthmen looked on steadfastly, and their conscience seemed to split, conjuring up simultaneously visions of their native planet. Not in the way their distant ancestors used to imagine their native places, depending on where they were born or lived—either as valleys covered with wide fields and damp forests, or sad rocky mountains, or the shores of transparent seas gleaming joyously in the warm sun. The whole Earth with its diversity of climatic zones, of cold, temperate and hot countries, passed in the mind's eye of each astronaut. Equally beautiful were the silvery steppes swept by free-roaming winds and mighty forests of dark pines and cedars, white birch trees, feathery palms and giant blue-green eucalyptuses, the misty shores of northern countries with walls of moss-covered rocks and the whiteness of coral reefs in the blue glow of tropical seas, the cold, imperious glitter of snow-clad mountain ranges and the nebulous, shimmering haze of the deserts, rivers—broad, majestic and slow-flowing, and galloping wildly in herds of white horses down the rocky beds of steep gorges—a wealth of colours and abundance of hues, the blue terrestrial sky with clouds like white birds, the scorching sun, and grey, rain-laden clouds, the eternal changes of the seasons. And amidst all this wealth of nature—the even greater diversity of people, their beauty, aspirations, deeds, dreams and tales, sorrows and joys, songs and dances, tears and anguish...

In everything—in buildings, factories, machines and ships—one saw the manifestations of the might of intelligent labour with its awe-inspiring inventiveness, artistry, imagination and beauty of form.

Perhaps before the large slanting eyes of the strangers there floated even more ambitious visions in the cold blue hues of

their planet, perhaps in the transformation of their less diversified nature they had advanced farther than us, children of the Earth? The idea took shape in the earthmen's minds: we, creations of an oxygen atmosphere hundreds of thousands of times more common than theirs, have found and will still find a great number of conditions suitable for life, we shall find, meet and join with brothers—people from other stars.

But what about them, products of rare fluorine, with their unusual fluorine proteins and bones, with their blood of blue corpuscles that absorb fluorine like our red cells oxygen? These people are locked up within the close confines of their planet. Perhaps they have long been in quest of similar beings, or at least of planets with a suitable fluorine atmosphere. But how were they to discover such rare gems in the infinite universe, how were they to reach them over thousands of light-years? One could readily understand and sympathise with their despair, with their great disappointment at meeting oxygen-breathing humans, perhaps not for the first time.

In the strange ship's gallery views of colossal structures took the place of the fluorine planet's landscapes. Their slanting walls resembled buildings of Tibetan architecture. There were no right angles or horizontal planes: the smooth contours curved gracefully from the horizontal to the vertical in spirals and helices. A dark cavern the shape of a twisted oval appeared in the distance. As it drew nearer the earthmen could see that the lower part of the oval represented a broad road ascending in a steep curve into the dark entrance of a building the size of a whole city. Over the entrance big blue characters set in red shimmered like ripples on water. The entrance drew closer, and inside the earthmen could see a huge dimly lit hall with walls glowing like fluorescent fluorspar.

Then all of a sudden, without any warning, the picture disappeared. The surprised astronauts, all set to see something unusual, felt as though something had literally hit them. A plain blue light went on in the gallery behind the transparent partition. The strange astronauts appeared. This time they moved swiftly, with fast, sharp motions.

A sequence of cartoons flashed on the screen. They flitted by so rapidly that the earthmen had hardly time to grasp their

meaning. Somewhere in the cosmic distance a white spaceship like the one alongside *Telluris* was travelling. Its central ring rotated, sparkling and throwing out rays in all directions. Suddenly it came to a halt not far from a blue dwarf star. It began to send out rays, shown by streaks on the screen, in the left-hand corner of which a second spaceship now appeared side by side with another ship, in which the earthmen recognised their own *Telluris*. The streaks reached the white spaceship, which immediately moved away from *Telluris* and disappeared in the black distance.

Moot Ang heaved such a loud sigh that his subordinates turned to him with a mute question in their eyes.

"Yes, they shall be leaving soon. Somewhere far away there is a companion ship of theirs with which they are in communication, though I can't imagine how this is possible over the vast distances separating them. Now something has happened to the other spaceship, its message has reached our strangers—or it would be better to say, our friends."

"Perhaps it's not damaged but has discovered something important?" Taina asked in a subdued voice.

"Possibly. Whatever the case may be they are leaving. We must hurry to photograph and record as much information as possible. Most important is their charts, their course, their encounters. I have no doubt that they have met oxygen-breathing people like us."

An exchange of messages with the strangers revealed that they could stay on for another terrestrial day. The astronauts, fortified with a dose of stimulants, worked away frantically, vying with the inexhaustible energy of the swiftmoving grey inhabitants of the fluorine planet.

They took pictures of illustrated textbooks and made recordings of the strange language. They handed over collections of minerals, liquids and gases in corrosion-proof transparent containers. The chemists from both planets tried to make out the meaning of symbols denoting the composition of living and inanimate substances. Afra, pale with fatigue, stood before diagrams of physiological processes, genetic tables, schematic representations of embryological stages in the development of the organisms of the people of the fluorine planet. The endless molecular chains of fluorine-resistant proteins were at the same time remarkably like our protein molecules, containing the same kinds of energy filters

and shields developed in the struggle of living matter with entropy.

Twenty hours passed. Tay and Kari, half-dead with fatigue, appeared in the gallery with rolls of stellar charts showing the whole route of *Telluris* from the Sun to their meeting point. The strangers began to hurry even more. The earthmen recorded on ferromagnetic tape the location of strange stars, distances in strange measures, astrophysical data, and the criss-crossing zigzags of the paths of the two white spaceships. All this would subsequently be deciphered with the help of explanatory tables which the strangers had prepared in advance.

And then—the earthmen broke out into exclamations of joy, for first at one, than at another, a third, a fourth, a fifth star on the screen, there appeared enlarged circles in which planets revolved. A picture of a clumsy pot-bellied spaceship was followed by a flock of more graceful vessels. On oblong platforms lowered from their bodies stood beings in spacesuits—undoubtedly human. The sign of an atom with eight electrons—oxygen—amplified the image of the planets and ships. But the latter on the diagram were joined with only two of the depicted planets: one close to a big red sun, the other revolving about a bright golden star of spectral class F. Apparently the oxygen-based life on the planets of the three other stars had not yet attained the level of penetration into space, or perhaps intelligent life had not yet evolved on them at all.

The earthmen had no time to find this out, but they now had in their hands invaluable data about the roads leading to inhabited worlds lying hundreds of parsecs away from the place where they had met the strange astronauts.

It was time to part.

The crews of both spaceships lined up facing each other on either side of the transparent partition: the pale-bronze people of Earth and the grey-skinned people of the fluorine planet, the name of which the earthmen had not been able to establish. They exchanged gestures of friendship and sorrow, smiles and reciprocally understandable glances of intelligent, attentive eyes.

An unbearable feeling of anguish gripped the people of *Telluris*. Even their departure from Earth, which they had left

for seven centuries, seemed to them a less painfully irreparable loss. It was impossible to reconcile oneself with the thought that in a few moments those attractive, strange but good-willed people would disappear forever in the cosmic void in their lonely and hopeless quest for intelligent life of a nature similar to theirs.

Perhaps only now did the astronauts fully realise with their whole being that the main thing in all their quests, aspirations, dreams and struggles was man. The main thing for every civilisation, for every star, for every galaxy, and the whole of the infinite universe, was man, his intelligence, emotions, strength, beauty, his life.

The ultimate goal of the boundless future after the triumph over the Heart of the Serpent, after the mad, ignorant and evil squandering of vital energies in the lower-organised human societies—the ultimate goal was the happiness, the preservation, the advance of man.

Man—this was the only force in the universe capable of acting intelligently and of advancing, over the greatest of obstacles, towards a purposeful and comprehensive reshaping of the world, that is to say, towards the beauty of an intelligent and mighty life filled with abundant, surging emotions.

The commander of the strangers made a sign, at which the young woman who had demonstrated the beauty of the people from the fluorine planet flung herself in the direction of Afra. With outspread arms she pressed her body to the partition as though she would embrace the beautiful woman from Earth. Afra, oblivious of the tears rolling down her cheeks, beat against the transparent wall like a captive bird against the bars of its cage. The light on the strangers side went out and the darkened glass became an abyss which engulfed the earthmen's emotional outburst.

Moot Ang turned on the terrestrial lighting, but the gallery on the other side of the partition was empty.

"Outside party, don space-suits to disconnect gallery!" Moot Ang's voice rang out, shattering the anguished silence. "Mechanics, man motors, astronavigator, to the control station! All prepare for flight!"

The astronauts went out of the gallery, carrying the instruments they had been using. Only Afra stood motionless in the dim light falling from the open hatch, as though gripped by the icy cold of interstellar spaces.

“Afra, we’re closing the hatch!” Tay Eron called out from inside the ship. “We want to watch their departure.”

The young woman woke up from her reverie with a start and, with a cry of, “Wait, Tay, wait!” ran to the commander. The surprised assistant looked after her incredulously, but Afra soon returned, with Moot Ang on her heels.

“Tay, set up the searchlight in the gallery! Have the screen set up again!” the commander ordered.

The people moved swiftly, as in an emergency. A powerful beam shot through the gallery and blinked with the same intervals as the beam of *Telluris*’ radar had at the time of the meeting. The strangers stopped their work and appeared in the gallery. The earthmen lit the blue No. 430 light. Afra, shaking with excitement, bent over the drawing board which reflected her quick sketches on the screen. She drew the double helical chains of hereditary mechanisms, which should be generally similar in earthmen and the fluorine people. Then Afra drew a diagram of the metabolic processes in the human organism, the essence of which is the transformation of the radiant energy of stellar luminaries obtained through plants—this too should be common to the strangers. The young woman looked over her shoulder at the motionless grey figures, crossed over the fluorine atom with its nine electrons and substituted an oxygen atom instead.

The strangers started. Their commander stepped forward and walked up to the transparent partition, his big eyes studying Afra’s clumsy drawings. Then he lifted his hands with the fingers entwined over his forehead and bowed low before the woman from Earth.

The strangers understood the vague idea that had flashed through Afra’s mind at the very last moment which, spurred by the grief of parting, she had dared voice. It was bold indeed, for it meant changing the totality of chemical transformations that bring into the motion the infinitely complex structures of the human organism. By acting on the hereditary mechanisms it could be possible to replace fluorine metabolism with oxygen metabolism! All the features, all the hereditary qualities of the fluorine people would remain, only their bodies would function on a different energy basis. This stupendous task was as yet so far removed from any possibility of realisation that even the seven centuries that *Telluris* would be away from Earth, centuries of steadily

advancing achievements of science, would hardly bring its solution very much closer.

But the joint efforts of the two planets could certainly work wonders. And if they were joined by other intelligent brothers—the fluorine humanity would not pass away without a trace, like a shadow lost in the depths of the universe.

When the inevitable time came and people from different planets of countless stars and galaxies joined hands in space, then the grey-skinned inhabitants of the fluorine planet would perhaps cease being the outcasts the freak structure of their bodies made them.

So perhaps the grief of inevitable parting and loss was exaggerated? The fluorine and terrestrial people, so inaccessible in the structure of their planets and bodies, were similar in the way of life and practically akin in intelligence and emotions. It seemed to Afra, studying the big slanting eyes of the white spaceship's commander, that she read all these thoughts in them. Or was it merely a reflection of her own thoughts?

But the strangers apparently possessed the same confidence in the might of the human intelligence so characteristic of earthmen: the tentative spark of hope lit up by the terrestrial biologist apparently meant so much to them that their friendly gestures no longer looked like signs of parting but rather spoke of future meetings.

The two spaceships drifted slowly apart, taking care not to damage one another with the jets of their auxiliary motors. Then the white spaceship disappeared in a cloud of blinding flame behind which, when it went out, the earthmen could see nothing but the darkness of space. Now *Telluris* too accelerated and entered the pulse sequence that acted as a bridge spanning formerly unfathomable interstellar distances. The astronauts, tucked away in their safety berths, did not see how the light quanta approaching them shortened and the distant stars ahead turned blue and violet. Then the ship submerged in the impenetrable darkness of zero-space, beyond which the vibrant life of Earth flourished and awaited.

Translated by Vladimir Talmy

D. Granin



(b. 1918, town of Volyn, near
Kursk)

The life and work of Daniil Granin are very typical of contemporary Soviet literature. Shortly before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, he graduated from the Leningrad Polytechnical Institute. He worked for a while as a factory engineer and in 1941 joined the people's militia and went to the acting front. He served as commander of a tank platoon during the war. By the time he made his literary début, he was thirty, had been through a great deal and had something to tell the reader.

It was inevitable that the leading characters in most of his books should be people working in technology and science—the author is very much at home in this milieu. Granin became particularly well-known for his novel, INTO THE STORM (1962), and the story, THIS STRANGE LIFE (1974), describing the life and work of Lyubishchev, a scientist of encyclopedic knowledge and a truly remarkable personality. Whatever the subject of his work,

Granin is always overwhelmingly preoccupied with serious moral problems. His autobiographical story, RETURN TICKET (1976), is a typical example. A trip to Staraya Russa, the town where Dostoyevsky lived for some time, sets him reflecting on the destinies of the people whom he knew when he was still a boy and on his own life; thinking deeply and seriously, with the life and work of Dostoyevsky, the great psychologist and novelist, often providing help and support.

Daniil Granin's striving to illumine in man the maximum of which he is capable, inspired him, in collaboration with the Byelorussian writer A. Adamovich, to write and publish what is perhaps the most powerful of all his works. It is about human courage and is called THE BLOCKADE BOOK (1977).

(An excerpt)

A dense dark warmth carried us from lamp to lamp, past noisy parties with guitars, past quiet couples and solitary drunks.

Staraya Russa of Dostoyevsky's time, sunk in provincial hibernation, was a lower-middle-class town of people with few claims to learning or culture, and still less to all those lofty, complex passions portrayed by Dostoyevsky. For him the town was the scene of action, but its people were not his prototypes. These were not the Staraya Russa people of the past century with their absence of mental life; his characters were in many ways symbolic figures, they spoke a different, often elevated language, they were more cultured and highly educated than the townspeople of that time. Take schoolboys, for instance, or just one of them—Kolya Krassotkin. Moreover, the author did not need such identification. His purposes were different. But sufficient has been written about this by experts—for instance, by Mikhail Bakhtin.

It was about his brilliant research that Georgi Ivanovich talked to me now, drawing from it with fervent conviction the superiority of Dostoyevsky over all other writers the world has ever known—to be compared, if at all, only with Dante and Homer. Among all the most devoted admirers of Dostoyevsky I have never met one more enthusiastic or active. In his love for Dostoyevsky he almost depersonalised himself, leaving no time for publication of his own modest works, never putting himself forward in any way, only his Dostoyevsky, and having no interest other than his memory, his fame, his memorial.

In his work on the museum he was giving flesh to a dream, and in this, like many passionate natures, he reached complete self-abnegation, dissolving himself entirely in the service of his idol. How did all this happen? Where did he draw this blazing enthusiasm and what fed it? Now and then his heated responsiveness contained a kind of hypersensitiveness. It was as though he was responding to frequencies inaudible to the common ear. I had known him for a long time, but only now I began to sense how much in him was incomprehensible. It was the same thing with Andrian Savelyev, the philosopher who had managed to find a

meaning in everything except his own life. His mind did not help him, something always hindered him in translating his musings into conviction. Philosophy melted his character. This summer he had turned over his garden house to a slight acquaintance, a woman with a sick child, but he had grudged a boat to his own son for his holidays. With every action he seemed to contradict himself, he did it as though in defiance of himself. I knew him but did not understand him. But why talk about Andrian? Take my own daughter. I saw her grow up, I knew every detail of her face, but did I know why her enthusiasms changed? She was perhaps more of a riddle to me than anyone else. I looked about me and found that those closest to me are frequently an enigma. I don't understand what makes them tick. Like that "black box": I know only what they say, what they do, but I don't know why. But am I not a "black box" to myself, too? Why, for instance, did this memorial mean so much to me?

The town had set aside a whole district from the embankment to the Pervomaisk Bridge with a number of streets round the Dostoyevsky house where everything would be left as it was. The old street lamps would be restored, the posts—nothing would be new. Even the concrete pillars proposed for strengthening the embankment were turned down, and it was decided to use wooden ones. The past would be given its home, complete.

Why did I find such consolation in this memorial where little would in fact be original?...

...In the "Blue Danube" by the bridge the beer had run out and the men were finishing their rubbishy fruit cordial known locally as "mumble". A grey-haired, well-shaved man with hanging jowls looked at me eagerly. He was bored, he had nobody to talk with, he was one of those whose drink tastes better when flavoured with conversation.

"Your health." He raised his glass. "Excuse me—you're a stranger, I think? Come because of Dostoyevsky? I saw you with Georgi Ivanovich by the door, so I said to myself—Dostoyevsky. I live close to the museum, we've got a little house there, so we're in the Memorial. I wanted to put up a metal garage. Georgi Ivanovich wouldn't have it. Spoils the picture. He won't let the street be asphalted, either. It's like as if we're all serfs—of that writer. Oh, don't think I'm complaining. I'm a reader myself. I've got a son, a major in

the army. But there's something—if you don't mind, I want to ask your opinion. Now don't you go thinking anything, I like you, you've taken my fancy. It's often that way, you see a man and you take to him, and another you don't. And you don't know either of them, but that's how it is. And if you don't know anything about them, then where does it come from, that's what I want to know. Eh? But that wasn't what I was wanting to say. I've read that book, *The Karamazov Brothers*, read it all. Because you see, it's a historical and cultural treasure of our town, and we live here where it all happened, there's excursions going past and people come specially. I took all my holidays reading it. And on the whole it's all finished off real wise, the way they're all to blame, they all helped in their father getting killed. You see how it was? Now, I'm a father myself and I can well understand it. But let be with that, the only thing one needs to depict all this, is skill, but please, explain something else to me: there's the devil tells Ivan if you launch an axe high enough into space, it'll start flying round the earth as a satellite. It's written there, black on white—a satellite. A hundred years ago, I looked it up, the date. But what satellites did they have in them days? Where did he get it from? And mark this—launch an axe! The symbol he chose! You'll be saying, maybe, that it is the devil who is speaking and the devil can talk riddles. But the devil means something, too. It's clear to me. Now, just you think a minute—there'll be a satellite! Pardon my question, do you remember that part? How can you explain it!? Is it really conceivable just to imagine such an exact prophecy?"

He spoke so loudly that everyone was looking at us; triumphantly he fixed me with an unwinking gaze as though he had stuck on the thought, but with rising excitement.

"I checked to make sure—they could have brought it up to date, so to speak, so I specially chose an edition that came out before the revolution. And it's just the same. Word for word. What d'you think of that? That's what I'm asking you—how did he know about space achievements? And that sets you thinking—maybe there's other things he knew—eh?"

"Of course."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"Nothing surprising. An English writer called Swift wrote about the satellites of Mars, and they were discovered only

after a hundred and fifty years. It's accepted among good writers."

"You don't say. What's accepted?" he almost yelled and rasped open the zipper of his nylon tunic. "Nobody would allow it. It's against all the laws of science. Tell me what you mean, explain it."

"With pleasure." I leaned closer to him and said softly, "Dostoyevsky was thrown back to us from the future, from the year two thousand."

His eyes rounded, his mouth opened, his pendant cheeks stretched, he turned pink—and all of a sudden I saw a boy with a tangle of yellow hair, a gap-toothed mouth—saw Lame Petka, our ringleader in Kislitsi.

"No, dear comrade, since you've started, then tell us the whole of it, what's it mean—thrown back? And what for? It's no joke, this sort of thing."

"A time machine," I said. "Haven't you heard of it? H. G. Wells and Jules Verne wrote about the Moon, and Pushkin said, 'A Monument I've raised not built with hands, and common folks shall keep the path well trodden.' How did he know? Writers and poets do get a knowledge somehow, they have a link with the future.—Excuse me, I don't know your name and patronymic."

"Pyotr Sergeyevich."

"Well now, Pyotr Sergeyevich, you said, and quite correctly, that there may have been other things Dostoyevsky knew. Our trouble is that we aren't yet able to find them in his books, we can't yet see clearly, we haven't lived long enough."

He looked into my eyes, laughed thinly, tossed off the remains of his wine and grimaced.

"Great classics do sometimes see what's in the future. But within limits. Would such a divergence from science be allowed? It could mean the upset of all physics! And you're wrong to support it, with things like those you can go a long way, eh, longer than comfortable. Now me, I think specialists ought to study these things. You can't just leave it this way." He banged his glass down on the counter—that's that! He said something more I didn't catch, I was examining him from all sides. "You're a man of learning, eh? You ought to bring some of them specialists along to study it all, because it's not right to leave it."

Limping, he went over to the bar to get his glass refilled. He returned with his glass and a small, round, narrow-faced man who looked like a hedgehog, and whom he called Sasha Dmitriyev. Sasha wore a jacket with thickly padded shoulders, short, long out of date but little worn, of dark-blue gabardine, very strong material.

"I want to ask you," the hedgehog addressed me with no preliminaries, "will there be a monument put up to Dostoyevsky in time?"

"Possibly."

"Right. And the next question: what for? What service has he done? He wrote what he wanted to write. What the muse dictated, as they say."

"No need to put one up if you don't want it," I said evasively.

"They say he's made our town famous, but what do we get out of that? Now, famous generals like Suvorov or Zhukov—that I'd understand. They saved the country. But they keep on putting statues up to writers and artists. What for? They worked for their own pleasure." He waited politely for a moment to give me a chance to argue, then continued triumphantly: "You may ask me what I suggest. Well—make Vassili Ivanovich remembered for the embankment he fixed up so handsome. And we've had a head doctor at the hospital, he got it enlarged. Got a coronary pushing it through, too. There'd be some point in putting up a bust to him. But if it's Dostoyevsky, it's ourselves we're glorifying, not him."

He panted exactly like a hedgehog, I remembered how we used to catch them. On the far side of the pool, it was—a whole colony of hedgehogs lived there, on the path to the swamp.

I asked Pyotr Sergeyevich whether he had lived in Kislitsi before the war. He had.

"So you're the forester's son?" he said mistrustfully. He remembered father, but denied all knowledge of me.

"How come, Petka?" I asked. He had been the leader among us, a strict leader and a daredevil. It was he who taught us to lie down under trains. And now—he didn't remember me!

"Was it you that had the burning glass?" he asked.

"No, that was Shurka Konyukhov."

"What did you have?"

I shrugged. "Nothing."

"There you are, you see."

Shurka had been the gardener's son. With his burning glass we wrote graffiti on all the walls. But I had had nothing, and left no clearly etched memory.

"Have you got anyone there?" he asked—he couldn't quite make out why I had been to Kislitsi. He listened to me dubiously.

"Remember how we used to lie down under the trains?"

"Well, and so what?" he said suspiciously; he evidently preferred not to remember our foolish "dares". "No one to keep an eye on us, so we played the fool."

He could tell me nothing about the pool. He had never been back to Kislitsi since the war. What had he to go for, all his folks had moved away, some to Novgorod, some to Leningrad, but most of them here, to Staraya Russa. Those who had gone back, they'd all drifted away to other parts in the 'fifties.

"Why'd I go there?" said Pyotr Sergeyevich contemptuously.

"It's your home after all."

"For some it's home, for others it's muck. I hardly got away. The vodka I used, treating folks, before I got them to let me go. Wasted my best years there. Doing what? A cooper. If I'd been in a town those years—oho! I'd got a leaning for all kinds of science. But what's the good of talking!" He looked with loathing at the inky liquid in his glass.

"Stop raking things up," said Dmitriyev. "He can't understand, anyway. Things are different with them. As for us—as the song says, no use complaining of what's past. And anyway, there's little you've got to complain of as I can see, the house you've got—nobody could wish for a better one. And you've a decent job, too."

"But a real good job—do the ones as deserve them, get them? And what am I without it? Have I got a spring inside to move me or have I not—that's the question. Where I'm headed I don't know myself. What do I want? This place where we live—neither town nor village. In a town everything's aimed at elevating man's personality. But here it's all gardens, orchards and poultry."

He spoke judiciously, as he had about Dostoyevsky, searching something out, following his thought. It was impossible to dig down to Lame Petka within him.

"It's strange," I said slowly.

"What is?"

"A lot of things. For instance, that once we used to lie down under trains."

"I just can't get you and what's it matter? Daft lads' tricks. I'd be shamed to think of it."

I smiled at him but the smile was not accepted.

We would lie hidden in the grass not far from the signal. A shunting engine would push trucks about, making up trains. A train moved along, tail first, now you had to jump onto the track and lie down between the rails. Slowly, with rattling chains, the coaches passed over your head. The most frightening moment was when the locomotive arrived. A smoky heat enveloped you from afar. There was a smell of oil, of hot iron, coal—it seized you, pressed you down against the ground, against the sticky sleepers soaked with tar and creosote.

The drivers swore and threatened to tip down hot cinders from the firebox.

"Incidentally, Kolya Krassotkin lay down under a train, too," I said. "You'll remember it if you've read *The Karamazov Brothers*."

"Krassotkin? Nikolai?" He drank, grimaced, and waited, listening to something inside him. A lilac mist dimmed his eyes. "The gymnasium scholar? Of course, they called him 'you', instead of 'thou', they called all the boys 'you', it was respect. Now me, my bosses still call me 'thou' to this very day."

Dmitriyev burst out laughing.

"That's because they like you. Either respect, or liking. Take your choice. Me, I think you can do better with liking."

"Don't you be counting up if I do well or ill. Respect I get by my work, not from their moods. I've a right to it. It doesn't grow out of those guffaws and jokes of yours. A man has to respect himself first of all. Call himself 'you'. Then all

the rest will come, too. Wait a bit, I was talking about Krassotkin."

He tried to reach me through his fog. "So he lay down under trains, too? How come? And he did, he did it for a dare. I remember now. He lay down, Krassotkin. And that's exactly like them tricks of ours. Circus tricks. Now, how do we get to be linked like that?" His look, his face, his whole figure froze motionless. "Fits in, eh?"

It did, but not completely. Evidently this was a fool trick that had gone on in our parts for a long time and lasted till our childhood. Perhaps lads dared each other to the same thing at other stations and halts, that I don't know, but with us it was a sure thing, and it was interesting that Dostoyevsky's first note about his new novel begins with the words: "Find out whether it is possible to lie between the rails under a coach going at full speed." Had he heard about that lads' trick in Staraya Russa or in the other parts? The railway lines were the same.

The mist in Pyotr Sergeyevich's eyes burned with a quiet lilac flame.

"If Dostoyevsky knew about earth satellites, he could know about our kids' tricks, that's nothing to him. And what if it was we whom he had written about?" Pyotr Sergeyevich stopped short for a moment, open-mouthed. "What if he meant us? Picked us out? Nikolai Krassotkin is Pyotr Khokhryakov. See what a loop it makes?"

"Now there's something!" Dmitriyev caught him up with the enthusiasm of a football fan. "Look where he's taking us! Into the museum among the exhibits! Guides'll lead people up to him. Krassotkin!"

But Pyotr Sergeyevich waved him off fretfully, hurrying after his new idea; his excitement mounted, his gap-toothed mouth breathed out wine and heat.

"Maybe it's me. Why not, it all fits in, like dovetailing. That's why I ploughed through that book. I could feel it. And by the way, it was on that Krassotkin that Alyosha Karamazov himself put such hopes. He might have been religious, but all the same he was advanced for his time. You can tell that, the way he demanded a solemn promise from that Krassotkin and his pals. And not just any way, keeping discipline and getting good marks. Quite different approach. You'll remember it, of course, you're a specialist."

"He called them to goodness."

"But nothing concrete, nowhere near it," he said solemnly. "If you'll permit me, I know it by heart." He modestly raised his eyes to the low board ceiling with its naked electric bulb and said in a singsong, "'Let us remember how good it was once here when we were all together, united by a good and kind feeling which made us, for the time we were loving that poor boy, better perhaps than we are.' That's what he called the children to." Pyotr Sergeyevich tugged at my shoulder, and bent towards me. "To remember. Eh? D'you think they did remember?"

"I don't know."

"They forgot! I don't remember myself. How's that? Why? There's little I remember from early years. That is, I do remember, of course, but I don't think much about it. I don't want to. I should want it, according to Dostoyevsky. Because I did have moments like that. Sure I did. Everyone had—as a child. Now—why don't I remember them?" he insisted and then stopped, thoughtful.

"Got our heads too full of other things. The everyday things. The plan, quotas," Dmitriyev mumbled. "It's all because we're conscientious about our duty."

Pyotr Sergeyevich said nothing; his eyes were closed and the deep folds by his mouth became deeper.

I waited. His words stirred something in me, but I could not grasp the unfinished thought. In the last moment it slid away, circled tantalisingly, exasperating in its closeness.

Dmitriyev whispered something to him. Pyotr Sergeyevich laughed lazily and moved away from him with a wink at me or perhaps at something behind my back.

"What's there to note? What boy'd he be? Aye, and you, too... There's none of you remembers anything."

Then I heard him laughing by the counter and proclaiming, "Seems like all that was written about me—how I used to lie under the train." I could tell he was fooling.

The likeness between the Petka of former times and Pyotr Sergeyevich was gone. Anyway, I didn't want their identity. Perhaps, for that matter, my own "I" of today would also do better to live isolated from my childhood, my youth, my war years. Those had been different people, a boy and man who had once lived, and only the frail narrow bridge of memory linked them. And there I had been, thinking we could

embrace, and revel in tender memories: how we had caught bleaks, and how good the bread had been, and how the forest wasn't the same now, and the snow was different...

Round little Dmitriyev came rolling over to me, took my arm placatingly and explained the situation. All the awkwardness was because we couldn't have a drink on it, on this meeting, that was why Petya was cross. To take someone home without anything to put on the table—nay, that would never do (the idea of just offering tea of course never entered anyone's head, and to have suggested it would have been in the highest degree improper). There was only one chance, to beg a bottle of spirits from the buffet waitress. Only—relations were difficult, it would be no good them asking, but me, now, a visitor, and a man of culture—when I'd just met old friends, we'd played together as boys—of course she'd agree, naturally, with the appropriate "thanks" forthcoming.

All this was carried out, the mechanism worked faultlessly except that the waitress did give me a queer look or two, something between curiosity and amusement.

They caught up with me in the square, grinning and merry. The whole plan was as clean-cut as a ritual: to down the bottle at once, in the garden; the bench was already selected in the bushes, and in the twinkling of an eye there appeared a newspaper, an onion on it, a wrinkled pickled cucumber alongside, and a paper cup.

"Mumble is mumble, a right name for it," Dmitriyev pronounced. "You mumble any sort of rubbish. It's got no wings to it. Vodka, now—that sets your wits working. And dry wine—better still. I got used to that, working with a building gang of Georgians, got the taste. Real grape—when you learn to drink it, it gives you a lift. And the honey mead they used to drink in the old days, that'd have carried you upstream, too—that's my opinion."

Seated on the bench, both were transformed. Enough for them to be seated and a kind of domestic gaiety emerged, the civility of a well-conducted table.

"You think now there's naught to remember, Petya," said Dmitriyev gently, with enjoyment. "But take me, I've got four certificates of honour. And a badge as a good builder. Isn't that something to remember? That's not just bits of paper tin."

"You don't get my point." Pyotr Sergeyevich sighed and shook his head. "Now, how'll I put it? I've got it all clear

inside me, till I want to tell it and then—I just can't find the words." He took off his hat and fanned himself with it. "They give certificates, you see, for doing your work well. That's something different, again." His face twisted and reddened with the strain. "Now, if they'd give awards for—something—" With his hands he indicated something in the clouds. "Some spiritual achievement! Suppose that I had had a moment like that. Try to find it now—it came and it went, and sank right out of mind. And that's what I want explained—why?"

"Right enough. Dig down."

"It's because there was none as took note of it!" For a moment his speech and voice rang clearly. "I don't want any of your rewards. If they'd show me that minute, so's I could rub my eyes and see it. So's I could put it in a frame and hang it up to look at."

It was the very idea I had been seeking.

"Quite right!" I caught myself brandishing a fist. "Absolutely right. It has to be underlined when you're still a child, fixed like a photo—that's the thing!"

Dmitriyev was happy.

"It's good, sitting here! Pyotr Khokhryakov's a man of talent! If he'd got the time, he could write a book just as good as any as wins prizes!"

"But what have I got to put up in a frame?" Pyotr Sergeyevich was not to be distracted. "Fright! I recall how my aunt was taken to court for being late at work. And how our lads were run in for fighting on a holiday. And my parents—they'd only one thing to say—you mustn't do this, and that's bad, and you'll get the strap for t'other. And the same at school. If only, just once, someone had lifted me up and said: 'Look at the good thing you have done!'"

"That's a true word. You need good words and certificates for your heart, too," Dmitriyev agreed with a kind of despondent admiration. "Kindness and good words never spoiled anyone."

But Pyotr Sergeyevich frowned and shook his head.

"You're going off at an angle again, Sasha. It isn't thanks I'm after. If you could have shown my own self as a boy, what there was in me worth remembering. Don't set me up some other boy as an example, but me, myself, understand? And how did they treat us, eh? And now look

at us, we bring up our own kids with fear, just the same.”

We drank in turn from the paper cup, sniffed onion, and a sober paternal care linked us.

There were words in Alyosha Karamazov's speech which I had previously passed over, but now, after hearing Pyotr Sergeyevich, they made me think. “You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory preserved from childhood is perhaps the best education.”

He appeals to the boys to imprint in their minds this minute when they are united in love for Ilyusha, when they know their own goodness. Because this memory will always help them, no matter how life hardens or embitters them. Alyosha believes that such a memory is enough in itself to hold a man back from evil.

At the same time he demands nothing, he does not preach, so there is nothing one can argue about. You may laugh at his assurance all you want, that is easy enough and attractive for some minds, since Alyosha uses lofty, resounding, sentimental expressions which invite it. All this is true, but at the same time he is doing something great from the pedagogical point of view, he is *naming* this moment in its spiritual fineness, he is setting it apart, fixing it in the boys' minds, making of it a memory. And not merely the memory of something pleasant, but an ethically defined one: *this* is how splendid you were.

“Here, draw it mild!” Andrian winked. “You did something good once, you got praised, and from then on you keep cosseting yourself with the idea: oh, how fine I was! And because of that, you're ready to forgive yourself anything!”

No, such good memories cannot do harm, better to have these than to dig up from the past only prohibitions, shame and remorse. The happiness, the pleasure in your own actions of which Dostoyevsky spoke lays an injunction upon your spirit. It stimulates a sense of happiness arising from good actions carried out for others or for one person, and this feeling awakens the desire to repeat it, it gives strength, it gives meaning to life and does indeed *commit the spirit*.

To me, a man unversed in pedagogy, this was a revelation. And I began to test it, applying it to my own life and those of others close to me...

I was drowning. My father stood on the bank, sinewy, lean, white-bodied—and laughing. He had urged me to jump from the high bank with him, then he had picked me up and tossed me into the pool. I had never expected such treachery, I screamed, choked, thrashed wildly with arms and legs and cried. I was injured and furious.

That fear has etched the pool deeply in my memory. I can shut my eyes and see it before me. According to the adult standards of today the bank was not very high—a steep grassy drop, washed out underneath, held together by willow roots. The pool itself had a width of three or four good strong strokes, it was simply a hollow where the river rested for a moment between banks that fell back a little, especially the farther, low clay bank.

How lovely it was, that round pool where I was drowning.

From the end of July there would be a whirlpool in the middle, a small hollow, a toy whirlpool with resilient water tautly circling. This part was the last to freeze over in winter, and for some reason when it did, the ice was peculiarly transparent. It was like an ice window. We peered down through it into the darkness beneath. On sunny days we could see fish swimming, their backs gleaming dully through the ice. We shouted, beat on the ice, but it did not alarm them, they crowded closer and peered up at us; perhaps they thought it was summer up there. Close to the pool there was a tiny patch of beach that extended shallowly under the water. For a long time father had been trying to teach me there how to swim, but with no success. He himself was a good swimmer, he knew a number of strokes and could overtake the younger men. The river was narrow, so they would swim up against the current for a long way, right to the millpond.

...Now I was drowning. I felt that father did not intend to move. On the bank everybody was laughing—I must have looked comically awkward, thrashing the water desperately, eyes protruding with terror. Had I really been drowning they would, of course, have pulled me out; that made my fright comical. But I understood nothing of that, I hated them, and

father the most of all, I thrashed the water, choking, voiceless. And then all of a sudden I felt that I was swimming. The sensation was quite unfamiliar but I knew I was not touching bottom. I was swimming, swimming! The water no longer sucked me down into its brown depths, it held me, supported me like my father's broad hand.

My body knew it before my mind did, its floating quality came like a shove, it came once and for always, I felt it like a new ability, no, a new quality, as much part of me as being able to walk. In later years I learned the correct swimming styles, learned all the finer points from instructors in swimming pools, but that quality of floating came then, when the dense body of water became a friend, no longer something to be feared. When I climbed out, still sobbing and gasping, father picked me up and hugged me. "Good lad, now you'll swim." His hands trembled but he was still laughing. I realised he was not laughing at me, he was laughing out of gladness, he had known before I did that I was swimming. But for this, but for those trembling freckled hands, the hatred and rage, the loathing for his treachery would have left a wound, a scar in me, and who can say what will grow out of the psychological wound of a child.

"I can't help you any more now, my son," he said. Actually, he said it some years later and about something else, but for some reason it has all linked up and merged with that day.

After that I was never afraid of water again, not even when I swam far out to sea, in rough weather. My love of swimming saved me during the war at the Luga crossing, when we spent the whole night in the water. I could be wounded, killed—but not drowned. There was something of my father in the water, and in the worst moments it reminded me of him, like the touch of his hand.

I remember all this because father *defined* that moment in my life.

Why did he not do so in other cases? Nobody ever teaches parents how to fulfil their parental function. It is the most responsible of all functions yet people carry it out as best they can, guided only by the dangerous counsel of love.

Like Pyotr Sergeyevich, I could not remember adults who stopped me to say: remember how good you were at his moment, how kind and honourable.

The pool cannot possibly be reckoned as such an ethical memory. There was nothing of my kindness or love. The action was purely practical, and what my father taught me, like all fathers, was of purely practical use, something necessary for my life.

Nevertheless, there is a kind of warmth, something soul-satisfying, in this memory. Perhaps it was because I was able to see my father's love which he never expressed. Or it might be something else...

With the passage of years, from chance things I heard, I learned a good deal about my father. He rose before me not only kind and a hard worker, but wild and dissipated; he had gambled, it appeared, and in general painted the town red, then all of a sudden he divorced his first wife, left her everything he had, went to the girl with whom he had fallen in love, married her and carried her away to his forests. He was then already middle-aged while mother was just a girl, and at the time when he abandoned wife and family such a thing was far from being a simple matter. It is impossible now to dig up the details of this prehistory, but sometimes fragments of half-forgotten tales help me to piece pictures together as I think over the first, honeymoon months of their new life. Mother was a slender urban girl, accustomed to dressing well and with a fine singing voice, while father was twenty years older, all bone and gristle, thick-set like a bear. I heard about some forestry near Kingisepp, about an abandoned manor where they had settled, some distant forest preserves, gangs of bandits called "the greens", fires, frightened people of a former wealth brought to the forest to cut wood which was to be delivered to Petrograd for fuel, timber cut all round for the railways, meetings, complete confusion in the forestry administration of those years when some demanded nationalisation, others that the forests be handed over to the people, that is, the local population—with undirected felling, with new bosses of every kind, from the district centre, Petrograd, the poor peasant committees and the army. There they were, the two of them in the midst of all this, newly married, deeply in love, racing over the empty roads on horseback or on sleighs.

All this was before my days, in that unimaginable time when I did not exist, a strange, extraordinary time, and quite alien to myself. We can never know out of what love we were born, what words, what hopes floated over our conception.

One old midwife told me that one can almost always distinguish an infant born of love from one undesired or conceived accidentally. If mankind is still developing, creating, becoming wiser and more compassionate, it is only because of the children born of love. They are the majority. Love, love more than anything else advances the human race.

Had it not been for the river, the part of town beyond it would have been a dreary, abandoned piece of waste ground. The river gave life and meaning to the landscape.

The river was the town's adornment, free and in a way proud, as though knowing full well that it gave Staraya Russa its individuality. The sky would fade but the river never slept; the slightest movement, the splash of a fish—to everything it was responsive. Its polished surface gave forth light not very much, but the only light there was, spreading far into the fields along its winding length.

Before the bridge the river curved sharply, holding the town in a close embrace; it was this curve, this crossing of tributaries and falls which probably determined the site of the town. Many a time smoke had risen from ruins here, many times it might well have vanished like so many other devastated towns, but the river compelled it to rise again on the one spot indicated by the meshing of waters.

To me it has always seemed that it was the river which nurtured the town; it played with it, caressed its new embankments, then sometimes grew angry and flooded it, flowing along its streets.

The body of the river went down into the depths of the earth, linking up with subterranean lakes and salt springs, its blind roots rayed out far into the whole region.

The river changed little. It held safe the memory of the time when we sailed to Vzvad on home-made flat-bottomed boats. It preserved its banks, and colours, and scents. Now yellow, now brown, it broadened, became warm and light. Its steep banks were pleasantly deserted. Swallows darted above the unnown wild grass, and butterflies fluttered over it.

Vzvad had long been a fishing village. When father and I used to go there it could be called comfortably prosperous, but now it could be called simply opulent. I walked through Vzvad, comparing it with Kislitsi. It makes a difference when

the place is strange; all that was new here aroused no special thought. Very right and proper: they build, they become well off, they put up brick houses roofed with grey tiles.

We sailed on down the river to the old embankment, to the islands, to the ducks' nesting place. The river was a country in itself with its own people—buoy tenders, fishing inspectors, fishermen. The river folk could recognise one another from a great distance. They were quiet, leisurely folk, thinkers and observers.

1976

Translated by Alice Ingman

M. Shaginyan

(b. 1888, Moscow)

Marietta Shaginyan has courageously tackled one of the most complex and important themes in the history of our society and its literature—the relationship between Lenin and Gorky.

This subject is far from simple, as it calls for extreme accuracy and tact in throwing light on the friendship and the controversy between the two great men. But there is yet another difficulty with which Marietta Shaginyan has coped brilliantly: from the unique history of the association between these two men of genius, she has drawn lessons which can enrich the ideas of each one of us. And she has succeeded, because she has sensitively traced what is vital in Lenin's revolutionary teaching and what emerges from the whole life of that great democrat, Maxim Gorky; courageous service, unfettered by dogma, to the truth and to human progress.

Christmas at Sorrento

Mother dearest,

Best regards from Naples. I arrived here by steamer from Marseilles—cheap and pleasant. It was like travelling on the Volga. I am going to Capri from here for a brief visit.

Love and kisses. Regards to all.

Yours,

V. U.¹

“Merry Christmas”, or *Buona Natale* to the Italians, sets in throughout Italy, and for that matter throughout Europe, long before its actual date. It greeted me in late November when I arrived in Italy. I journeyed slowly, taking my time, from the north to the south, stopping for quite a while in the towns on my way, not, to tell the truth, attracted by the sights, but guided by my own great theme which as yet flickered in a haze of desultory quotations, sometimes lines from a letter, drawing me on by the kind of fortuities whereby, as the saying goes, the quarry runs to meet the catcher. An idea, a theme takes first hold of you, spurring you on to plunge into work, an idea which is as yet equivocal, unsolved, entirely novel to you—but on all sides, like the grass on a cart wheel, there suddenly gather and crowd in upon you clues, coincidences, discoveries, all unfailingly guiding your mind towards a solution.

I walked along the ancient streets, gazing absently at the attractive shop windows. Above the streets gay streamers hailed the approach of *Buona Natale*. Thousands of bright lights were set ablaze in the evening. A Christmas bazaar was in progress, with the most amazing things displayed in the shop windows; tiny trees of marzipan, giant twined, beribboned and sequin-sprinkled candles, an array of glass baubles, strings of golden garlands and billows of silver cobwebs. Only Santa Claus with his flowing beard and tasselled cap was not in evidence; his hour had not yet struck. But that Christmas fever, weeks ahead of the holiday itself, was in the air everywhere. In the very similarity to our own fir tree toy

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 37, p. 462 (Letter dated July 1, 1910).

bazaars there was something which caught and stuck on to the wheel of my meditations. The universal and the human.... But what was this? It called to mind that passage again—for several days now, like a tune, it haunted me, in all its inept and heretical implication—so it seemed to me under the hypnosis of thinking habits acquired over the years.

A half century ago, in a Moscow short of food, unheated, but vibrant with the excitement of the new life and new world outlook, Lenin's fiftieth birthday was being marked—very modestly as was usual in those days. The Moscow Committee of the Communist Party called a meeting for April 23, 1920, inviting Gorky to make an address on the occasion. In a somewhat gruff and breathless voice, soft at the beginning but gradually becoming louder and louder, Gorky made his splendid speech, the opening passage of which, when I read it years later, I remember made me pause, offending and shocking me a little by a thing of the heretical. Gorky said:

“Comrades, there are persons whose importance somehow cannot be encompassed by the human word. Russian history, unfortunately, is not rich in such personalities. Western Europe is. Take, for example, Christopher Columbus.... And we can name in Western Europe quite a number of such persons—persons who wielded a kind of lever as it were, steering history in their direction. In our own history I would say Peter the Great was, on almost was, such a person for Russia. Just such a person, only not for Russia [alone], but for our whole planet, is Vladimir Ilyich.”¹

It was the comparison of Lenin—Lenin!—with Christopher Columbus that seemed heretical to me.... I resented and deplored it and was perplexed at Gorky's use of it. Ahead of me, in Sorrento, was a month's labour on the closing theme of my book—the chapter “Lenin and Gorky”. I was going to Sorrento—the farthest from his homeland, the loneliest place in Gorky's life, where he was engaged in the writing of his *Life of Klim Samgin*—not merely to write this chapter and be done with it. I wanted to resolve for myself what these two persons had to give to one another, what lay at the bottom of their attachment and what need they had of one another. And then there cropped up unexpectedly that rather startling comparison made by Gorky in Lenin's own lifetime. On the

¹ Maxim Gorky, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, Moscow, 1949-1953, p. 204 (in Russian).

long trip to Sorrento, my first stop was Genoa, a lingering one, most likely for the reason that Gorky's statement, like a crossword puzzle, required to be solved promptly, at the initial phase of the trip, in the town where Columbus was born.

I could understand the impulsive Gorky with his prodigious memory-trove hitting upon the comparison with Columbus, for Gorky apprehended people in his own way, sometimes with utter disregard for history. Racked and unstrung by the flow of visitors to Capri, greatly distressed by Lenin's polemics and break with Bogdanov and Lunacharsky, Gorky had been persuaded by his wife Maria Fedorovna Andreyeva to take a trip through the north of Italy in order to get away from the routine and gather new impressions. In Genoa, Gorky had hardly emerged in the square in front of the railway station when he encountered a huge throng of people come to meet the train from Parma with the hungry children of Parma's workers who were on strike. He saw the Italians, workers too, befriend the children and take them home. And above them, in the square, towered the statue of Christopher Columbus. In a vivid and heartfelt account of this, at the very beginning and the end, he linked the statue with the throng of the workers: "...the noble figure of the man who discovered the New World...", "...on a high pedestal stood the figure of Columbus, the dreamer who suffered greatly for what he believed, and—he conquered because he believed. Today, too, he gazes down upon the people, as though framing with his marble lips the words: 'Only those who believe can conquer.'"¹

Genoa, with its palaces and villas, the many flags flown in its harbour, Genoa *la Superba*, lying on the seaward slope in three terraces, looked very different to me. I saw it as a city with that peculiar for Italy air of the Genoese—the man of enterprise, the seafarer, explorer and ... the avaricious philanthropist with a penitent Catholic conscience. Speaking in terms of European history, the city could be regarded as a witness in massive stone of ungovernable human passions, utter selfishness, and doubtful adventure.

On my very first day I climbed to the second terrace of the city to view a strange medieval monument recalling the

¹ Maxim Gorky, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 14 and 11 (in Russian).

philanthropy of the Genoese plunderers—the *Albergo dei poveri*, a hotel for the poor, a palace descending in stepped stateliness into the park below. It was now a home for the aged. From the stone walls of its hollow corridors to this day the works of old masters looked down upon you, but the corridors were bare. Aproned attendants speechlessly trundled the trolleys with the evening meal along them, while in the dim corners, toothlessly chatting, sat old men and women, old age being here as humiliating and burdensome as most likely had been the pathetic homeless poverty of the pilgrims who filled these quarters several centuries back. From here I walked to the centre of the city catching sight near the Porta Soprana of the House of Columbus. It was a solid block of masonry appearing not to have windows or doors and looking like a prison; however, there were windows and doors but they had been so overgrown with a heavy awning of moss as to become invisible. A stone hedge enclosed the house, and only by raising myself on tiptoe could I take a peep inside; what I saw was a neglected garden where resting on four small columns beneath a beautiful stone roofing stood a miniature belvedere ... that was all.

...That night, after my first day in Genoa, I could not fall asleep for a long time. Columbus! He had not even given his name to the new land he discovered, was not aware that he had discovered a new continent. Nor did he want to do that—he was merely out to find a new and shorter route to the advantage of maritime trade. That was Columbus for you!

SORRENTO

*...Und wenn der Mensch in seiner Qual verstummt.
Gab mir ein Gott zu sagen, wie ich leide.*

Goethe. "Torquato Tasso"

Driving from Naples to Sorrento is no great pleasure, I can tell you, for the person at the wheel. You can feel the rising resentment of that person against you as you sit there in the back of the car in total unconcern for what goes on outside on the road. You think or you read a yellow-bound detective story (most cheap detective novels in Italy have yellow binding) while your companion who is driving is going through

a hell which works havoc with his nerves and heart rhythm, the hell of the traffic congestion you find on all roads leading out of Naples, whether it is early morning or late at night. You move so slowly that pedestrians keep getting ahead of you all the time—and in jolts, one jolt ahead and an abrupt stop and then another jolt or two. And this can go on for an hour, two or three. No wonder the driver's sidelong glances at me were darts of hatred: I *would* want to go by car!

And indeed I was not having a bad time of it at all. I sat thinking, the scene remaining practically unchanged on the right, the left, behind and in front of me, the lack of impressions spurring rather than hindering my thoughts. I thought of two persons, who were close to each other, but who became aware of (or perhaps but sensed) the degree of that closeness only when the life was ebbing from them. Bad as was the traffic jam, one felt in the air the pleasant approach of Christmas, even the impatient jolts of the tightly packed cars spoke of the holiday excitement; street vendors somehow managed to pick their way through the jam and press on the passengers sundry goods at "bargain prices"; streamers across the highways proclaimed "Merry Christmas!" My mind, however, was on the way these two persons, close to one another, had died, and it struck me that there was a remarkable feature about their deaths.

I had with me, needless to say, not a detective novel; in my bag lay a rolled notebook containing excerpts from the books I needed, the books themselves being too bulky to take them with me on my travels. The passages I had copied out I did not even need to read, for I knew them by heart, knew them so well that I could see them before my eyes. There was the first passage—it must have been written with the tears streaming down the cheeks of the woman who penned it, for even now you cannot read it without tears.

"Dear Alexei Maximovich, we buried Vladimir Ilyich yesterday," Krupskaya wrote to Gorky. "...We discussed topics in the newspaper, which we glanced through every day. The time we read of your illness he showed great anxiety. He kept asking agitatedly: 'What, what?...' And then, too, he found in Guilbeau's book a reference to your article 'On Lenin' published in 1918¹ in *The Communist International*,

¹ Actually it was published in 1920.

and asked me to read the article to him. When I read it to him, he followed it with the closest attention....”¹

Six years had gone by after Nadezhda Krupskaya wrote this, but neither her tears nor the tears of those who followed Lenin’s coffin had run dry. On May 25, 1930, Krupskaya again wrote to Gorky: “...When you arrived, I wanted so awfully to talk with you about Ilyich, simply to cry out my woman’s heart in your presence, in the presence of a person with whom Ilyich talked more about himself than with anyone else.... And I kept remembering—I have already written to you about it once—the way during the last month of his life, having found the book in which you wrote about him, Ilyich asked me to re-read aloud your article. I can still see Ilyich’s face as he listened and looked out of the window, far into the distance, summing up his life and thinking about you....”²

Twelve years after Lenin had breathed his last, Gorky lay on his deathbed. The same Gorky, who had claimed to have an “organic aversion for politics”,³ whom the rigours of the revolution, his non-comprehension of the need for its severities, the rancorous wailing of the bourgeois intelligentsia, the famine and confusion in Petrograd, no longer the capital but teeming with metropolitan dregs, had estranged from the revolution in its early years, grim but morally uplifting and invigorating years; Gorky who had cut adrift from Lenin, and the Bolsheviks and then returned in the thirties into their midst, to be actively with them and, according to Krupskaya, was “head over ears in politics, wrote fervid publicist articles, saw workers to his heart’s content”,⁴—that living, dearly loved Gorky was slipping away. In spirit the Soviet people stood around him at his deathbed. But in the flesh with him was Professor Speransky, a deeply sensitive and intelligent doctor and physiologist. He was with Gorky on the last nights of the writer’s life and when Gorky passed away he wrote in *Pravda* a faithful account of these hours of nightly vigil.

According to him, the dying writer “several times men-

¹ *Oktyabr* magazine, June 1941, p. 20.

² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³ *V. I. Lenin and A. M. Gorky*, Letters, Reminiscences, Documents, p. 257 (in Russian).

⁴ *Gorky as Seen by His Contemporaries*, Moscow, 1955. “N. K. Krupskaya About Gorky” (in Russian).

tioned Lenin. Once during the night he began recounting his first meeting with him: 'I have not written of this, nor do I believe have I ever spoken of it. I don't remember where, but we met in St. Petersburg. He, small, bald, with a sly glance and myself, big, gangly, with the face and manners of a Mordvinian. At first we felt somehow ill at ease, but then we looked more closely at one another, burst into laughter and the ice was broken between us....'"

The dying Lenin, "summing up his life", mused about Gorky, and he longed to re-read what Gorky had written about him in his article. The dying Gorky mused about Lenin, and he had the urge to express what he had not told to anyone and had not managed to write down—the way they had first met, one, small, bald, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, the other, gangly, big, with high cheekbones, like a Mordvinian, looked more closely at one another, and gone was their feeling of being ill at ease, they burst into laughter and the ice was broken. With Lenin—through the medium of direct thought, with Gorky—the images he conjured up. Such had been this singular sudden communion of these two men by a whim of the memory when they were approaching death. It is of such import in the biographies of both these men that it is worth going deeper into, pondering over as one of the riddles of life.

What indeed was the essence of Gorky's article, written in 1920, still in Lenin's lifetime, and promptly published in issue 12 of *The Communist International*? What prompted the gravely ill, dying Lenin to strain all his faculties in order to listen to this article, gazing out of the window into the distance, "summing up his life", as it were?

Gorky wrote of Lenin as of a romantic, a utopian, a man with the vision of a marvellous world of happiness for all mankind: "...I cannot imagine him without this beautiful dream of the future happiness of all mankind, of a bright joyous life...."

"Lenin is more human than any one else of my contemporaries, and although his mind is certainly occupied chiefly by considerations of politics, which a romanticist would call narrowly practical, still I am sure that in rare moments of leisure that fighter-mind of his is carried away into a beautiful future, where it sees much more than I could ever imagine. The chief aim of Lenin's whole life is the good of all

mankind, and he must inevitably foresee in the distance of coming ages the end of that grand process whose beginning his whole will is ascetically and courageously serving.”¹

In those last hours of his life (and if we are to believe the Chronicle compiled by the Gorky Institute of World Literature he had, in any event, no more than twenty or perhaps only a few days left to live), it seemed to Krupskaya that, as he listened to the reading of Gorky's article, Lenin was summing up his life and musing upon the author of the article. The reader just now, after becoming familiar with Gorky's article, may have the impression that Lenin's mind was wholly occupied with the future, with the bright world of a happy humanity. But there is a third possibility, and this third is the most likely, considering that Lenin wished to re-read that which Gorky had written *about him, about Lenin*, and moreover still in Lenin's lifetime. Listening to a friend's words about him, picturing from these words his human course, the personal course of one among millions of people, Lenin—at a time when his life was running out—might well have turned his gaze *on himself*, meditating on his past and his person as the thinking, fighting, suffering, loving and feeling *human being* he was.

The objection may be raised that this is pure conjecture on my part and that nobody could possibly know what went on in the soul of Lenin just before his death. And yet there is an extremely forcible argument in favour of that third possibility. I do not think the reader overlooked the fact that Lenin had asked Krupskaya to *re-read* the article in question; this very article by Gorky had been *read* by Lenin three years before, at the time it appeared in print. This is in no way uncertain because the article had evoked bitter resentment from him and a special decision by the Central Committee. This is corroborated by the reminiscences of A. A. Andreyev who tells us that when the article appeared, and on top of it a letter by Gorky to H. G. Wells (published in the same issue), containing, in addition to high praise for Lenin, erroneous ideas relating to the Russian peasantry, the relationships between East and West, and so on, Lenin was *outraged*. He “*demand[ed] a stringent decision by the CC, pointing out the inappropriateness of such articles and prohibiting their print-*

¹ *The Communist International* No. 12, June-July 1920, p. 2387.

ing in a magazine. Such a decision was adopted on a motion by Lenin.”¹

The draft of the decision contains such words—“...as there is not only *nothing* communist about these articles, but a good deal that is *anti-communist* in them”.²

Could Lenin have forgotten both the CC decision and his own violent reaction to the laudatory tone of the article? That is hardly possible. And yet three years afterwards, when he was gravely ill, unable to speak or read and could only listen when read aloud to, he longed to revive in his memory what Gorky had written about him. Why? Surely this was not because of the political flaws in the article, and a desire to repeat his condemnation of them, or to express once again his displeasure at the laudatory appraisal which at the time of the first reading had struck him as inappropriate. Nobody could possibly know what went on in Lenin’s soul at that moment, but Krupskaya’s glance was on his face—which was genial, pensive, with no trace of aggravation. “I can still see Ilyich’s face as he listened and looked out of the window, far into the distance—summing up his life and thinking about you....”

And now let us recall the heavy burden with which Lenin was departing from life. He was leaving behind him the new world he had set out to build, a world which in the face of the greatest odds had to be preserved and developed; he knew that outside his doors his loyal comrades awaited his parting injunctions, counsel and assistance; he had deeply thought about each one of them over the past few years, warning each of dangers and pitfalls by a probing of merits and demerits and degree of fitness for revolutionary service; and finally his heart must have ached to see the grief and anxiety of his dearly loved wife and sister. All this must have weighed heavily on him. For all that, the glance fixed into the distance might well have carried his thoughts away from the future into the *past*, into the haven of memory. Time came rushing in *over and above everything else* in a sweep that turned the mind from the world unto self rather than the other way, posing perhaps for the first time the question: what stuff am I

¹ *Kommunist* magazine No. 5, 1956, p. 56 [Italics mine.—M. Sh.]. Lenin’s reason—“the inappropriateness of such articles ... in a magazine”—tells us that he was outraged not only by the “wrong ideas” but also by Gorky’s laudatory phrases addressed to him.

² V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 42, p. 205.

made of, what is the significance of the life I have lived, what does a writer and a friend make of me?

Gorky likewise was leaving behind him the burden of unfinished work. He had not completed the *Life of Klim Samgin* which he regarded as his lifetime's major effort; there was a host of professional labours left undone—letters unanswered, manuscripts belonging to others left unread, young writers fostered by him who needed guidance. His life had been made up of many loves and many attachments. But as he lay dying his mind turned on Lenin. It is not just that he remembered him but, according to Speransky, several times mentioned Lenin.

I had noted that there was something quite “remarkable” in the way both these men had the urge to hold communion with each other before their death. But when we pause and think of it, we shall not find it so remarkable after all. What is remarkable is that this friendship and deep affection between the leader-politician, the father of the revolution, and the writer, rough diamond of the people, this need that two such different persons felt for *each other*, has so far found no major portrayal in the arts. And what is even more remarkable is that we should fight shy of everything in Lenin's life which has a homely human touch and should put an impenetrable curtain over that very window looking “far into the distance” into which Lenin the man had gazed before he departed from this life.

“Ascetic and courageous”—thus Gorky described Lenin. Courageous—yes! But as to “ascetic”, on this point Gorky was wrong. Asceticism went against Lenin's grain, for he was an ardent partisan of sanguine life, a man who had had a profoundly satisfying personal love, who loved people warmly, deeply, fondly. Note what he wrote about his feelings for Marx and Engels: “I am still ‘in love’ with Marx and Engels, and cannot calmly stand any abuse of them.”¹ I remember what a revelation to me was one of the things Vera Dridzo wrote about Krupskaya in her reminiscences. It appeared that after seeing it repeated in books and magazines that during their life in Shushenskoye she and Lenin were solely engaged in “translating the Webbs”, Krupskaya's customary restraint broke. And she pointed out that at that time they were newly

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 281.

wed, in love with each other, everything delighting them in the midst of their "young passion",¹ the exact words employed by Krupskaya according to Dridzo. Krupskaya, this reticent woman, who had retained, in the 20th century, the chaste features of women revolutionaries of the past, must have been terribly annoyed by this prudish attitude for her to break through her restraint and speak of a "young passion". But we might as well admit the fact that many of our writers, scholars and historians have deliberately avoided mention of the more sanguine and personal aspects in the life of this greatest man of our age.

Lenin's life had been rich and encompassing, not ascetic. It had been a life of self-denial in many ways, perhaps, of "renunciation"—*Entsagung*, as Goethe put it—renunciation of the personal for the sake of the people's happiness, a life of supreme dedication, of the deepest commitment....

I was suddenly jolted out of my run of thoughts as out of a dream, though it had not been by a "jolt" but rather by the sudden "smooth sailing" of the racing car which, having broken loose from the congestion area, sped merrily along the narrow strip of the Bay of Naples coastline. To the right of us the water of the bay was a beautiful blue. This blue, despite it being the month of December, had the lambent glow of molten metal with hidden reddish lights of flame in it. The sun was strangely hot for this time of the year. On the left were sandy cliffs covered with wilting vegetation, and a rare sprinkling of dazzling-white structures. The scene grew more and more barren with no plant or wildlife to relieve it—and our car, like a rolling little ball, the driver more kindly, now pursued its lone course along the coast, flooded in the gold stream of sunlight. Pompeii was left behind somewhere in a depression and we passed the "Chenese Land"—Terracina. The views became more interesting. I shoved back into my bag the notebooks with the copied passages through which gingerly, like a child by the hand, I had guided my fumbling thoughts, and gave my attention to the scenery. However, I shall make a digression.

² Vera Dridzo, *Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya*, Moscow, 1958, p. 20 (in Russian). Here is the full quotation from Krupskaya: "We were newly married—and that brightened our exile. My not mentioning this in my reminiscences does not signify in the least that our life lacked poesy or young passion. And there he goes—'they kept translating the Webbs'."

Not only Krupskaya, but each of us whose life has been linked with Lenin's, needs to cherish that last vision of him—Lenin's face as he listened to Krupskaya reading to him Gorky's article, his gaze fixed on the vistas stretching beyond the window of his room. "In the last month of his life," wrote Krupskaya to Gorky. That meant in winter, with snow-powdered trees outside the window and yet a glimpse of vista caught in between the branches, perhaps the walk in the park, or a clear patch amidst the fir trees. Winter silence reigned outside; birds no longer sang and the crackling of the frost could not penetrate inside the walls of the house. Krupskaya read softly, in an even and low voice that would not disturb Lenin. She read Gorky's words:

"The chief aim of Lenin's whole life is the good of all mankind, and he must inevitably foresee in the distance of coming ages the end of that grand process whose beginning his whole will is ascetically and courageously serving."¹

It seems to me that the hint of a smile may have appeared in the corners of Lenin's lips at these words. There is no evidence to support this. Krupskaya, the sole witness, makes no mention of it. And yet I carry that smile with me—when I shut my eyes, or when in passing slowly in single file I gaze on the immobile features frozen in eternal silence at the Mausoleum. I am almost certain that the smile, just a hint of one perhaps, is no invention of mine. Why this sudden whim on Lenin's part of reverting to a long-forgotten and at the time it was written greatly infuriating article by Gorky? Surely what prompted him was not the need to bask, when parting from life, in a warm wave of plaudits. Or did he wish to verify for himself if his indignation at the time the article appeared was justified?

I now enter the domain of conjecture. I do it by the right of love. It is my key to that domain.

"...Hem, hem..." Ilyich might have said. "He imparted the widest variety of shades to the brief typical 'hem ... hem', from biting irony to guarded doubt, and often in that 'hem ... hem' there sounded the keen wit possessed by an extremely astute person well aware of the devilish absurdities of life,"² Gorky wrote about Lenin after his death.

¹ *The Communist International* No. 12, 1920.

² *V. I. Lenin and A. M. Gorky*. Letters, Reminiscences, Documents, p. 262 (in Russian).

What would be the meaning behind that “hem ... hem”? In the last years of his life, chafing under the invalid existence of practically enforced idleness, Lenin, ever a fighter, hankered for the company of his friend with whom he could cross swords as in their good old polemical days. He wanted Gorky’s article to be read to him in order to be stimulated by it, to receive an impetus to his thoughts. He longed for the hot breath of life—because “the living contradictions were infinitely richer, more varied, meaningful, than they first appear to the human mind”,—to be refreshed and invigorated. That would be a compensation for the ban the doctors had put on his engaging in polemics, seeing people on business or going outdoors to ski, something he knew he would never be able to do again. His thoughts might not have taken this lucid form, but there well might have been such stirrings deep in his heart, instinctively, wordlessly. The impetus was there, the mind set quickly to work in argument with an opponent.

“Ascetically and courageously,” Gorky had written committing a strictly formal error, for asceticism is incompatible with courage; an escape from life is cowardly, not courageous. And factually erring—for Lenin was never an ascetic. He was a fighter.

It is said that on departing from this world one’s whole life passes before one’s eyes, from childhood to one’s last days. What did Lenin see in his mind’s eye as he looked far into the distance? He gazed at the snow-covered path of the park. Shortly before a smith from the Glukhov factory had walked down this path. He was a striking old man who might well have stepped out of the pages of one of Gorky’s early stories. Locking Lenin in his embrace, the smith kept repeating: “I am a workingman, a smith, Vladimir Ilyich. I am a smith and men like me will forge what you have planned for us.”¹ There were tears in the old man’s eyes as he spoke. Lenin felt the warmth of the people’s love.... The workers of Glukhov had brought young cherry trees to be planted. Trees, nature—how good that was! Perhaps his memories carried him back to the time spent at the foot of Mt. Rothorn, in a little Swiss village. Three people roaming in the woods, gathering mushrooms which grew there so plentifully. And he may have remem-

¹ *Reminiscences About V. I. Lenin*, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1960, pp. 369-70 (in Russian).

bered his corner in the garden, the desk, the happiness of work and study.

Many years later Krupskaya was to write in her reminiscences: "We rose early, and before lunch, which was served, as all over Switzerland, at twelve o'clock, each of us was busy in his corner in the garden. At this hour Inessa often played the piano, and it was especially good to engage in our various tasks to the flowing strains of the music."¹ There were the warm undulations of the music mingling with the fragrance of the woods, of the mushrooms, the dry, mossy, sun-dappled hollows, Mount Rothorn and the creamy white roses....

Lenin knew how to hate in the struggle, which is only human. And Lenin could love from the bottom of his very human heart. Had he been different, had he been an ascetic, mankind could not have loved him so ardently, felt him so dear, so near, so needed, so much one of them.

May 28, 1968
Yalta

Translated by Susanne Rosenberg

¹ N. K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, pp. 237-38 (in Russian).

Poetry

A. Tvardovsky

(b. 1910, village of Zagorye
near Smolensk—
d. 1971, Moscow)

In Soviet Russian poetry, a special place belongs to Tvardovsky's work, just as, in the history of Soviet Russian literature, a special place belongs to the personality of the poet himself. The flood of reminiscences that inundated the pages of the press after his death testifies to his supreme moral authority. His rare talent and the uncompromising demands he made on it put Alexander Tvardovsky very high in the estimation of the public.

The son of a peasant blacksmith, he became a rural correspondent for Smolensk newspapers at the age of fourteen. He learned about the life of the people from the inside. The principal character of his many poems is a man of the people. His long poem, "The Land of Muravia" (1936) attracted widespread interest. But a truly resounding success accrued to "Vassili Tyorkin" ("A Book about a Soldier", 1941-1945), in which Tvardovsky developed further the folk elements already inherent in

his work. Vassili Tyorkin personified the traits of character which enabled the Russian people not only to hold their own in the deadly conflict with German fascism, but to win final victory. The folk hero, the folk idiom, the penetrating lyricism and shrewd humour have made this poem a classic of Soviet literature.

Tvardovsky's long poem "Horizons Beyond the Horizon" (1950s-1960s) was a kind of poetic testament. There is a constant shifting of planes and the portrayal of events historically important in the life of the people alternates with the life-stories of individuals, each, in one way or another, typical of our time

"Tyorkin in the Underworld" (1963) is a scathing satire on the obscurantism and bureaucracy that stand in the way of progress.

In the 60s, Tvardovsky also became prominent as a public figure. He became a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, the chief editor of the magazine "Novy Mir" and vice-president of the European Association of Writers.

Great talent, a feeling for the thought and language of the people, and a sharpened sense of responsibility for literature as a cause, brought Alexander Tvardovsky to the very forefront of Russia's distinctive association of writers.

Vassili Tyorkin

(An excerpt)

FROM THE AUTHOR

When the dust of war blows bitter,
When it's hot or cold as hell,
Nothing's nicer, nothing's sweeter—
From the spring or from the well,
From the faucet or from Nature,
From the hoof-track in the dell,
From the river, any river,
From the pool in winter's spell—
Than a drink of pure fresh water;
If it's water, then all's well.

In the stress and strain of wartime
When the going's getting tough,
On the snow, beneath the tall pine,
Out on bivouac, sleeping rough,
What can beat that good old front-line
Food, and who can have enough!

But your Cook must know his onions,
Yes, your Cook must know his stuff;
Always busy, never dreaming,
Never dozing on the job,
Serving soup all hot and steaming,
So that you can swear you've never
Tasted better Army grub:
Leaves you fit to fight forever,
Fit to tackle anything;
Fit as twenty men—
However
Soup is not the only thing.

Without any food inside you,
You can march a day and thrive;
But without your mates beside you,
And no stories to delight you,
It's a problem to survive;

Without baccy for the smoking
When it's "All Clear!" for a time;
Without laughing, without joking,
(Hey, pass this one down the line!);
Without you, Vassili Tyorkin,
Vasya Tyorkin, hero mine.

But you just can't go on living
Without one thing most of all.
What is that? The truth, arriving
Harsh, relentless, undeceiving,
Soulwards mercilessly driving,
Bitter though it be as gall.

Finally, it needs explaining
Why this soldier's book was penned—
No beginning and no end.

Why, you'll ask me, no beginning?
Well, there was no time for spinning
All this yarn from the beginning.
Why is it without an end?
So that we can spare our friend.

From the first days of affliction,
In the homeland's hour of grief,
You and I, Vassili Tyorkin,
Bosom friends became for life.

I would never dare forgo you,
There is so much that I owe you,
So much that I'm grateful for.
It has been a joy to know you,
Tyorkin, dear in time of war.

Can I leave you without warning?
Friendship calls for loyalty.

So we'll make our real beginning
Halfway through. And then we'll see.

THE ACCORDION

Down a road, in brand-new greatcoat,
Somewhere near the front-line zone,
As if for inspection belted,
Goes a lad to join his unit,
Rifle Company Number One.
Goes he cheerly, goes he blithely,
And the reason is quite plain:
Healed, his right arm swings as freely
As his left arm once again.

And, what's more, the frost is crackling
In the trees beside the road,
Stinging harder and yet harder,
Spurring onward like a goad.

Suddenly, a toot behind him.
Leaning out, the driver brakes,
Holds the door:
"Quick, hop in, soldier.
Get some snow and rub your cheeks.
Going far?"

"Back to my unit
At the front. Arm hit."
"I get it.
Hero, are you?"
"No, not yet."
"Then give us a cigarette."

Smoke and drive. The road's blue murder,
Just a cutting through the snow.
Swerve a fraction and you're in it;
Greatcoats off and here we go!

"Just as well you've got a shovel."
"Just as well. It would be hell."
"Just as well there's those'll help you."
"Some folks, do. It's just as well."

Onward roars the three-ton lorry,
Till a convoy comes in view.
Horse and infantry can skirt it,
Lorries have to join the queue.

Take advantage of the hold-up.
Chat a bit ... well, hardly chat.
Slumped across the wheel, the driver's
Passed out flat,
Just like that.
For how many hours, half-dozing,
Never resting, on the go,
Has the driver put behind him
In all weathers through the snow...

From the outskirts of the forest
To the unseen river, stand
Ordnance, tanks, field kitchens, trailers,
Tractors, lorries, cars—all jammed
Higgledy-piggledy, this way, that way,
Back to front and front to back,
While the tortured snow screams under
Wheel and caterpillar track.
And out here the wind's pernicious,
Close to iron, the frost is vicious.
It can cut your chest in two;
I'd stand back if I were you!

"All this pile-up—nothing doing.
And no spare accordion going.
We'll get frozen, waiting here..."

Peels his gloves off and starts blowing.
"We've got one,"

says someone near.

Stamping down the powdery snowdust
In a kind of hopping dance,
By their tank, two shivering crewmen
Warm their feet up in advance.

"Well, who's got the squeeze-box, fellers?"
"Why, we've got it here, inside..."

And the gunner glanced round, shamefaced,
At his driver by his side.

“Shall I play one for the road, then?”
“Play?... No harm in that, I’m sure...”
“What’s the matter, then? Whose is it?”
“He’s not with us any more...”

Then the driver interrupted.
“Our commander,” ventured he,
“He was very fond of playing.
We’ve just buried him, you see...”

“Oh...” The soldier glanced around him,
Smiled in his embarrassment,
As if guilty of a blunder
Where no real offence was meant.

And, to smooth the matter over,
He explained himself with care:
“Thought it might be better played on,
Than just lying idle there.”

Then the gunner:
“He sat through it
Yesterday up in that turret.
We were all great friends, you know.”

“Well, of course, then, it’s no go.
I can guess just how you’re feeling;
This one is my second war.
I’ve been wounded once in action,
And I’ve been concussed, what’s more,
And, who knows, tomorrow maybe
I’ll be in it once again...”

“Oh, well, blow you,” said the driver,
“Go ahead and play it, then.”

When our soldier took the accordion,
It was clear he knew his stuff,
As he ran his nimble fingers
Down the studs to start things off.

Eyes half closed, he played a haunting
Melody, sad and forlorn,
From somewhere around the country
Near Smolensk, where he was born.

And the ancient squeeze-box, lonely
For its master dead and gone,
Warmed things up along the highway
Somewhere near the front-line zone.

From their lorries, white with hoarfrost,
Soldiers poured, as to a fire.
Who was playing whose accordion
They could neither know nor care.

Only two of them, the driver
And the gunner, standing by,
Stared and stared at the musician
In a puzzled kind of way,

As if they were seeing phantoms
In the mists of whirling snow,
As if they had met the player
Somewhere not so long ago.

He, with swift and nimble fingers,
Started, as if by request,
Playing of the three brave tankmen,
Friends and comrades of the best.

Yes, the song was all about them:
Every detail, every word.
Stern, those two in leather helmets
Bowed their heads at what they heard.

And the soldier worked his magic,
Took them far away somewhere.
"Oh, how young you are, you people,
All you soldier boys out there!

"I would say a lot more, really,
But I'll keep it hid from you.

I would play much better, truly—
It's the best that I can do.

"I forgot myself completely.
Guess the tune went to my head.
That's enough of being serious,
Let's have something gay instead."

All come running to the player
For a warm and chat. They stand
In a circle round him.

"Hold it!
Let me blow upon my hand!"

"Diddums get himself frostbitten?
Better call the ambulance!"
"Listen, never mind those waltzes,
How about a Russian dance?"

Once again he peels his glove off,
Glances challengingly round,
Then he seems to turn that squeeze-box
Inside out and upside down.

Yes, forget—it's not the moment
To remember anyway—
Who's been killed and where he's buried,
Or whose turn will come next day.

Who will live to tread the grasses
On this Earth in time to come,
Go home to his wife and family—
Where's his wife, and where's his home?

And the dancers leave their places,
Coming forward, pair by pair.
Things warm up inside that circle,
Breath steams in the frosty air.

"Come on, ladies, spin more lively!"
"Mind their toes, gents, as you go!"
Look, here runs the lorry driver,
Desperate not to miss the show.

Who's this father of a family,
Like a bolt come from the blue,
Life and soul of all the party,
Shouting, "Quickly, let me through!"

In he goes to lead the dancing,
Wags his head from side to side,
Improvising steps and movements
Quite impossible to describe,

As if clumping round the dance-floor
On a village holiday,
Letting off a stream of wisecracks,
Gags and patter on the way.

One crack follows on another:
"What we need is floor-boards, brothers!
Damn! Damn!
Just can't slam
With a wham—
Bam-bam-bam!"

"What we want is heels of metal
Nailed on each and every boot!
Then we'd stamp in fine old fettle
Till our heels were all kaput!"

And the music works its magic,
Takes them far away somewhere.
Oh, you are such marvellous people,
All you soldier boys out there!

Send them all through fire and water,
Yet, wherever they may be,
You will hear an old accordion
Wheezing out some melody.

And its voice is pure and simple,
And your heart thrills to the sound.
Then the gunner and the driver
To the player:

"Listen, friend,

Don't we sort of seem to know you?
Was it you, as we recall,
That we drove away from battle
To the Army hospital?
Yes, your uniform was bloody,
You were thirsty as can be..."

Sudden silence. "Now you say so,
There's a chance that it was me..."

"We'll be held up on repair work
You'll be pushing on, of course."
"True enough."
"Then here you are, mate.
You can take that box. It's yours.

"Play it when the fancy takes you.
You're an expert, anyway.
Keep your comrades in good spirits."
"Boys, you can't meant what you say!"

"Not to worry," said the driver.
"We've made up our minds, you see.
Our commander loved his music;
Keep that in his memory..."

From the fringes of the forest,
As a thousand engines roared,
Echoing up and down the convoy
Came the order, "All aboard!"

Hills and vales again, and snowdrifts,
And the highway flanked with firs.
On he rides, Vassili Tyorkin—
Him and no one else, of course!

DEATH AND THE SOLDIER

As the battle din receded
Over the hills and far away,
Tyorkin, lonely and unheeded,
In the snow abandoned lay.

Blood and snow to ice had hardened
Underneath him. Stealthily,
Death stooped over him and whispered:
“Soldier, come along with me.

“I am now your own dear true-love,
And we haven’t far to go.
I shall make the blinding blizzard
Hide your trail with sifting snow.”

Tyorkin shuddered as he froze there
On his ice-encrusted bed.
“I don’t need you here, *Kosaya*,¹
I am still alive, not dead.”

Laughing, Death stooped lower, saying:
“Here, young fellow, that will do.
Though you live, your hours are numbered.
I know better far than you.

“As I passed, my deathly shadow
Touched your cheeks so young and fair,
And you haven’t even noticed
How the snow is settling there.

“Do not fear my shades of darkness,
Truly, night’s no worse than day...”

“What d’you mean? Just what exactly
Are you after, anyway?”

Here Death almost seemed to falter,
And she even half withdrew,
“I ask little, almost nothing...
This is what I want of you:

“Just a token of agreement
That you’re weary of this world,
That you pray for Death to free you...”

¹ Death the Squint-Eyed. But female in Russian.— *Tr.*

"Sign my name, then, in a word?"
Death fell thoughtful:
"You could say that—
Sign for everlasting peace."
"Go! I sell my life more dearly."
"Don't you bargain, lovey, please!
What's the use? Your strength is failing."
Death drew closer, bent down low.
"What's the use? Your lips are freezing,
Cold your teeth..."
"The answer's: No."

"Just look yonder. Night is falling,
And the skyglow heralds frost.
There's no point in freezing slowly,
While my precious time is lost..."

"I can wait."
"You foolish fellow,
You can only come to harm.
I could wrap you up in sheepskins
And you'd be forever warm."

"Ah, you trust me! Look, you're weeping.
Now you feel more drawn to me."

"Lies! It's from the cold I'm crying,
And not from your sympathy."

"Happiness or pain—what matter?
Savage is this frost. The snow
Swirls across the open meadow.
No, they'll never find you now...
Even if they come to fetch you,
It will be too late. You'll freeze.
You'll be sorry that they didn't
Leave you here to die in peace."

"Death, you play a cat-and-mouse game."
Painfully he turned away.

"Me, I want to go on living.
I'm still much too young to die."

"Get up, then! You'll still regret it,"
Death continued with a leer.

"Start again from the beginning—
Cold, fatigue, pain, dirt, and fear...
Friend, just give a simple verdict:
Is all that worth struggling for?"

"Verdict? There's no court of justice
Where a man can sue a war."

"Worse—you'll miss your home and family,
You'll be simply worried sick."

"First of all, I'll get the job done:
Beat the Hun. And then go back."

"Granted. But suppose you do, then?
What's the point in it for you?
All the land's been stripped stark naked,
Ravaged, looted, plundered, too.
Just a shambles..."

"I'm a worker.
I'd pile in and get things done."
"No house left."
"I'd build a new one."
"And no stove..."
"I'd soon make one.
Jack-of-all-trades out of boredom,
Game for anything—that's me."

"Let a poor old woman finish:
If you've lost an arm, maybe,
Or in some such way been crippled,
Even you will cease to care."

For the Man, this argument with
Death was more than he could bear.
Still the blood was flowing freely,
And his limbs were growing stiff.

"Listen, Death, I might be willing,
But there's just one single *if*."

Tortured by the cruellest yearning,
Lonely, helpless, weakening,
Half beseeching, half reproaching,
Tyorkin started bargaining:
"Better and worse men than I am
May have lost their lives in war,
But, when all the fighting's over,
Will you grant me one day more?
On that day of celebration,
Festival of world renown,
May I hear the victory salvoes
Thunder over Moscow town?
Will you let me join the living
As they throng the streets outside?
Tap a certain cottage window
In my native countryside?
When my folks step through the doorway,
Death, O Death, before I go,
May I say a word of greeting?
Half a word?"
"The answer's: *No*."

Tyorkin shuddered as he froze there
On his ice-encrusted bed.
"Then be gone from me, *Kosaya*,
I am still alive, not dead.

"I shall weep, shall howl with torment,
Die forgotten in this field,
But of my own will and choosing,
Know that I shall never yield."

"I'll find you a purer motive,
If you'll give the sign. Fair's fair."

"Wait! They're coming for me. Searching.
From the hospital."

"Fool! Where?"

"Yonder, down that snowy footpath..."

Death laughed long, as at a joke.
"That's the burial detail coming."
"Never mind. They're living folk."

Soft snow crunching, two approaching,
Clang of crowbar hitting spade.
"Here's another one. We'll never
Get'em done by nightfall, mate!"

"And the day's been heavy going.
Mate, give us a twist of shag.
Let's sit down here on this dead 'un,
And we'll have a crafty drag."

"Would be better if we ate first—
Cabbage soup—a mess-tin full."
"And a snifter from a hip-flask."
"More than that—a good long pull."
"Two long pulls."

Albeit feebly,
Tyorkin found his voice and said:
"Just get rid of that old woman,
I am still alive, not dead."

Both men stare. Would you believe it!
He's alive, as they can see.
"How about that?"
"Get him back to
Hospital immediately."

"Happens one time in a thousand!"
But they take it in their stride.
"One thing if it's just a body—
This here's got a soul inside."

"Only just."
"Say that again, chum!
You're near frozen stiff, you know.
We'd have sent you to the People's
Commissar for Down Below."
"That'll do. Don't keep him waiting.
Chop his coat free. Careful, mind!"

Lift him up."

And then Death muttered:
"Still, I'll follow on behind.
Yokels, both of them; they're used to
Duties of a different kind.
Fools!" she thought. "They'll jolt and
jar him.
In the end, he'll still be mine."

Two stout belts and two long shovels,
And two greatcoats, end to end.
"Soldier, careful with your comrade."
"Off we go. Chin up, my friend!"

And the two men somehow manage
Not to shake him needlessly.
With solicitude they bear him,
While Death tags along close by.

And the road's no road, but rather
Virgin land waist-high in snow.
"Hey, it's time you had a breather,
Fellers..."
"Ah, but don't you know,
My dear fellow," says one bearer,
"There's no need to worry, mate.
You're a live 'un that we've got here.
Dead, you would be twice the weight."

Then his friend:
"That's common knowledge.
Live 'uns hurry," added he.
"But a dead 'un, he's already
Home—wherever that may be."

It depends on how you see it,
They decided in the end.
"Here, you've only got one mitten.
Take mine while it's warm, my friend."

As she watched them from the sidelines,
Death was forced to think, at length:
"Why, they're thick as thieves together,

All the living. It's their strength.
I can only strike a bargain
When they're on their own, and so,
I suppose I must postpone it."
And Death, sighing, let them go.

1941-1945

Translated by Alex Miller

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "O. Bergholtz" with a long, horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

(b. 1910, St. Petersburg—
d. 1975, Leningrad)

It fell to Olga Bergholtz to be among those writers and artists who were the spokesmen of wartime Leningrad. It is hard to say what path her muse might have taken had not fate meted out to her this severe trial of strength and staunchness of spirit in the city blockaded by the nazi armies (1941-1943).

Her literary gifts became evident at an early age: her first book of poems appeared when she was only 19. Before the war she was a journalist in Kazakhstan, then worked for a factory newspaper in Leningrad. She published several volumes of verse and prose. But it is not these books nor any of her post-war works but, above all, the poems she wrote during the siege which has won her a permanent place in Soviet and world poetry.

Regularly at the appointed hour, despite bitter cold and methodical shelling of the city, despite the merciless hunger that bore hundreds of thousands of Leningrad people to

the grave, she would make her way to the broadcasting studio and recite verses addressed to the people of the besieged city. This woman of slight stature became a symbol of the courage of the people of Leningrad who survived the 900-day siege and preserved their faith in ultimate victory over the nazi invaders.

It is more than likely that Olga Bergholtz, whose verse is a classic example of sublime public-spirited poetry, will herself become in time the subject of the loftiest poetry.

February Diary

(An excerpt)

Myself as hero I have not conceived,
I did not thirst for glory, nor for orders.
I breathed one breath with all the Leningraders,
and did not play the hero—merely lived.

I do not boast that, though we were blockaded,
I never once betrayed life's joyful core,
nor that, like dew, such joy just radiated,
lugubriously lit up by flames of war.

If I may take legitimate pride in something,
it's simply that, like my surrounding friends,
I'm proud that till this hour I go on toiling,
not sitting by with idly folded hands.
I'm proud that in those days, as ne'er before,
we felt the uplift of our work at war.

In mire and murk, in hunger and in grieving,
where death, our shadow, followed at our heel,
we often then had such a happy feeling,
and with such gusty freedom we were breathing,
that all our grandsons well may envy feel.

Oh yes, by awful joy our hearts were lighted,
which still has not received appraisal just,
when the last crust of bread we divided,
and the last pinch of dry tobacco dust;
and when we held long midnight conversations
round pitiful and damply smoking fires,
how we should live,

come victory celebrations,
when we'll evaluate anew whole lives.

And you, my friend, in times of peace again,
as life's high noonday later will remember
the house in Avenue of the Red Commanders,
the dying fire, the draught through shattered panes.
You'll straighten up again, as now, so youthful,

rejoicing, weeping will your heart recall
the darkness, and my voice, the winter ruthless,
the barricades round factory gate and wall.

Long may they live, and ever may they rule—
the simple earthly things, and human gladness,
foundation of our land's defence, our toil,
the deathlessness and strength of Leningraders.

Long may they live, serene and calm in sorrow,
who more than once gazed death straight in the face
endured the suffocation of blockade
as Common Man,

as Worker,

and as Warrior.

My sister, comrade, friend and brother-lad,
we were blockaded, bathed in fire, no pity...
All we together make up Leningrad,
and the whole world is proud of our great city.

A double life we're living now at bay:
encircled, frozen, hungry, deeply grieving,
we breathe tomorrow's
happy generous day,
and we ourselves have fought for and achieved it.

And whether it be morning, noon, or evening,
still on that day we shall arise and go,
towards our victorious army, streaming,
in our freed city which we all love so.

We'll go without bouquets,
in battle helmets,
in heavy padded coats,
and frozen hand-mitts,
to greet our soldiers, equal with them stand.
And, spreading wide its sabre-fashioned pinions
A brazen Glory will stand above our union,
holding a wreath in swollen, fire-scarred hands.

January-February 1942

Translated by Walter May

Indian Summer

There's a season alight with its own, strange shimmer
Of misted sun, most tenderly warm.

People call it

Indian summer

And it rivals the spring itself in charm.

Already the flying gossamer's clinging

Lightly, warily round the face...

How full is the tone of the late birds' singing!

How fierce and festive the flower-beds blaze!

The great rains have long since passed in thunder,

The dark, silent field has yielded its all...

More often a glance strikes a spark of wonder,

More seldom, but blacker the jealous fits fall.

O generous wisdom of Indian summer,

I welcome you gratefully, but can you hear?

My lost love, where are you? Where are you? Come,

answer!

But the woods have grown silent, the stars more

austere...

You see now—the season of stardust is over.

I suppose it is time that we parted—and yet

It is only just now I've begun to discover

How to love and to cherish, forgive—

and forget.

1956

Translated by Avril Pyman

Before the Separation

All that we shared to you I am leaving:

All that was best

of each year bequeathing,

All the old tenderness;
All the old loyalty
And, on my knees, I renew oath of fealty,
Raise to my lips
the standard of happiness
Then let it fall, war-tattered and rigorous.

As for you and for me, though our road may be long,
Such hapiness will not again befall us.
Yet still I believe that the best of my song
Will immortalize its descarded colours...

The first swallow too, to you I am leaving
That dauntless returned to blockade and calamity
'Neath our miserable roof her gallant nest weaving.
You shall hear her again in your hour of extremity.

And I shall pack up as my portion our crosses
Taking with me our tears,
and our blows,
and our losses,
All our rash daring,
all our insecurity,
Our difficult, hard-won, fine-tempered maturity,
The cradle-song I never sang
to our daughter,
Composed in a war-night of blizzard and slaughter,
That I never sang—you never shall hear it.
It swells not, it fades not, and I alone bear it...
Farewell then, my bright one! I loved you
right dearly.
Your lot shall be richer—and I have dealt fairly.

1956-1960

Translated by Avril Pyri

FROM THE CYCLE OF POEMS TO ANNA AKHMATOVA

Anna Akhmatova in Leningrad in 1941

By the house, by the house beside Pushkin's Fontanka,
By doors thickly blanketed
And portals of fine iron wrought

Citizeness Anna Andreyevna Akhmatova,
Poetess Anna Akhmatova,
For night-time duty reports.

On her left
 a heavy gas-mask hangs at her side.
On her right in the light garb divinities choose
Raising a veil
 to reveal
 glowing eyes,
Stands, pipe in hand,
 her "dear visitor"—the Muse.

The houses opposite, across the Fontanka, form a silent
 solid mass.
Each window bears white paper crosses. Behind the panes
 it is pitch-black.
Pure as pearl—the translucent darkness
 glimmering in the window-glass.
On the approaches to the city the enemy is again
 driven back.
Tell me, what is it you, the aggressor, fancy that you
 can overcome?

Anna Akhmatova
 beside the Fontanka
 standing close to the battle-front?
Is it the White Night she is defending,
 over the city glowing brightly?
Is it the Muse with her deadly weapon,
 the pipe she is holding ever so lightly?

1970-1971

Translated by Peter Tempest

A stylized, handwritten signature of Alexander Prokofiev in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left and right.

(b. 1900, village of Kogona, near St. Petersburg—
d. 1971, Leningrad)

One of the most colourful and original of the Soviet Russian poets, Alexander Prokofiev was born into the family of a peasant fisherman and, as a young man, became a participant in the Civil War and a member of the Bolshevik Party. His work is remarkably consistent. From the very first verse collections, published in the 30s, to the last books, which won high honours, including the Lenin Prize, Alexander Prokofiev painted the world of a lakeside village in the north with its special way of life, hostile to sentimentality, but based on a silent willingness to lend a hand in the hour of need.

A distinguishing feature of Prokofiev's poetry is its closeness to folk-song, its emotionality, its richness of language and its colourfulness. His poetry is deeply patriotic. The life of the people during the war years was depicted on a large scale in the long poem, RUSSIA (1944), about the Shumov brothers from Siberia who arrive as volunteers to

defend Leningrad and who are with the crew of a heavy mortar.

Prokofiev's verse collection, INVITATION TO A JOURNEY (1960), is a gem of post-war Soviet poetry: it is packed with content, varied in its themes, vivid and colourful in form. As a man of the people, Alexander Prokofiev returned to the people a hundredfold in his poetry the wealth of their beautiful, lovingly polished language.

I couldn't live happy a day long without you
Since you hold my fortune securely in thrall.
I really wonder where 'twas that I found you,
Where 'twas I first met you, I just can't recall.

No one can remind me of how it all started:
The birches from morning their earrings donned,
The streams started romping, the willows vibrated,
The stars lit up dazzling, the skies blushed at dawn.

The wind may some day tell the wide open spaces
The tale of my life, of my service and love.
But honour's no honour, my fortune is graceless
And glory is nought without you, my beloved!

1937

Translated by Lydia Kmetyuk

* * *

Count the glimmering stars and the lustrous,
Count the showers that fell, and the storms.
The blithe throat of the thrush—that is Russia,
Woods with white-footed birches adorned.

Add the generous song that's heard rushing
Of a sudden from footpath and lane,
Its exuberance dearly Russian
Instantaneously skyward it strains.

And some primitive hut in the thicket,
Pensive willows eternally sad,
And our dearest mothers at wickets,
As the distance they patiently scan.

Add the timeless expanse of our country
And the dashing accordion's sweep,
And the cranes and the mills and the foundries,
And our liltingly musical speech!

Every day for some reason was peerless,
Those were days we were happy to know.
Concertinas, accordions, reed pipes—
How the music o'er meadows would flow!

My dear Land, you will never be stifled,
And the songs of your Springtime won't fade
Since the nightingales' rapturous trebles
Even this hour the frontlines pervade!

And on footpaths familiar and hallowed,
At the doorstep to every home,
Running endlessly, billow on billow,
Whitely frothy, the bird cherries foam!

1943-1944

Translated by Lydia Kmetyuk

* * *

How imposing this mast timber grove!
It resounds in the wind clear and vibrant.
Every one of its treetops has grown
Almost sky-high, so youthful and verdant.

How delightful the birches' fine ridge!
By the roadside their suff greenly swashes.
Though their insteps the water has bleached,
Still it lovingly over them washes.

In that Land that to me is so near,
Sky-blue bluebells ring out in the meadows.
On their ramified antlers the deer,
Wear the sun's setting rays in the shadows.

And the birches in willowy tiers,
Drooping wistful where breezes meander...

I adore this dear country to tears,
To the last little blade in the meadow!

1945

Translated by Lydia Kmetyuk

A Few More Words About Work

We all have to work much more, much better,
Then we'll live to be much older!
That is why with such dispatch
Do I try to do what's right.
That is why my work must match
What I write, black on white!

Every paragraph I start,
Speaks about this matter.
My appeal to every heart
Peace of mind will shatter.

There's no fun in peace and quiet,
It's just crashing boredom,
I don't even want to try it,
Better get some work done!

Far the highway stretches,
It stretches far.
Work's a pile that reaches
To the stars!

1959

Translated by Lydia Kmetyuk

Russia's Founded on Granite

To Georgy Storm

* * *

Where Lake Ladoga laps,
Where the Svir and the Kola,
There's the blaze of my heart
Like a shard of the Sun.

In the foothills and interhills,
In the great Russian valleys
My heart is ablaze
In the nightingale bushes.

It flames like the banner
That flaps in the wind
Almost unheeded, but selflessly
Ardent.

And yet I heed
All that I see:
And with my heart
I embrace my Russia.

With her wheat and rye-fields
Full of ripe ear-corns,
With her rich-voiced
Songs of the road.

With expanses of land
Stretching over the meadow,
Over the river, over the field,
Over the forest and over the hills,

With the legends and tales,
With ancient traditions,
With the nightingale song
Which I took for my own.

And with her great
And eminent people
And also—with her iron
And granite.

Forget all that can be forgotten—
Remember one thing:
Russia's founded on granite!
Keep that in your heart
And make your stand firm—
Her basement is granite
The weathered grey stone!

This basement is strong,
And vast is the land,
And soberly
I do affirm:
Russia's founded on iron!
Granite and iron.
Take a dig where you like:
Literally
They are everywhere.

Russia, Russia—
It stands on the rock-ridge,
Or otherwise
It stands on iron!

There never was
Nor can be
A stabler foundation.
I wonder if people know,
If the whole world knows,
But it's a useful thing
To bear in mind:

Russia's founded on iron,
Russia's founded on granite.
And let people's memory
Preserve the discovery:
Russia is founded on granite!

1965

Translated by Galina Hamper



(b. 1913, Lutsk—d. 1972,
Moscow)

Yaroslav Smelyakov spent his childhood in the country. He studied at a printing school in Moscow, then worked as navy, lumber-jack, miner, typesetter, and newspaperman. His verse appeared in print for the first time in 1931. Already characteristic was the combination of lofty message and humour, colloquial diction and music. In the first months of the war against nazi Germany, Smelyakov was taken prisoner. He survived three years of hell in a nazi POW camp. His first collection of verse came out in 1948. From then on, he was, as it were, in a hurry to make up for lost time: a new collection came out almost every year. With powerful, plebeian directness, he conveyed all the thoughts and feelings typical of his contemporaries, who had been through all the trials harsh wartime reality could devise. These were the poems of a man who had not only triumphed over adversity, but who could sing of indestructi-

ble love of life, of faith in people, of love and reverence for woman, for her inner beauty and nobility. In Smelyakov's verse, we come to know a colourful poet who unbosoms himself with remarkable honesty and spontaneity, finding true satisfaction in his active commitment, in his "furious" democratic feeling.

Should I fall ill,
I'll give all the doctors a miss
and appeal to my friends
(no, no, I'm not sick in the head):
spread me the steppe out wide,
and curtain my windows with mist,
and hang up a star of the night
to shine on my bed.

I never was finicky,
nothing could hold me back.
Should I be wounded
fighting to save a just cause,
bandage my head
with a mountain track,
and cover me up with a blanket
of autumn flowers.

Give me no powders or pills at all.
A glassful of sunlight clear and pure,
the hot desert wind,
the silvery waterfall—
let these be my cure.

Consider the mountains and seas,
and sense what they've always known:
we live forever,
they surely seem to say.
So not with white pills
but with clouds let my path be strewn.
Not by a hospital corridor shall I leave you,
but by the Milky Way.

1940

Translated by Alex Miller

The Spinner

The wooden handle is rosy,
the blade dark and dry as a bone;

with her distaff at work by the window
a woman sits old and alone.

In her hands, growing ever thinner,
softly humming under the strain,
run the silvery fibres of snowflakes
and the fine strands of springtime rain.

She's a thousand years old, is that spinner.
Not a trace, though, of grey in her hair.
She began in the days of Vladimir;
When our grandsons are gone, she'll be there.

On her lap in a soft pile come spinning
the rumble of partisan carts,
the ash of a burned-down village,
brown birch leaves like human hearts.

She spins us our morning breezes,
our peaceful and wartime days,
the broad waves of radio stations,
the thundering ocean waves.

With patience and love she keeps spinning,
from her work never raising her head,
the threads for a blood-soaked bandage,
and a militant banner's red.

Decembers give way to Aprils,
flowers blossom in forest and park.
Unceasing, our days she keeps threading
with fingers wrinkled and dark.

Her blue eyes look stern through her lashes.
Lightnings flare and illumine her home.
The winds of enormous Russia
in her chimney rejoice and moan.

1946

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

You Fair Ladies of the Russian Land

With the stage-lights in a dizzy whirl,
Juliet dies, no more than just a girl.

Festive tiers and boxes dare not move,
as the fair Ophelia pleads her love.

All arrayed in spangles gold and blue,
Cinderella dances into view.

Women seated in the darkened hall,
not one poet has mentioned you at all.

Those weren't fairy caverns where our wives
tried their Army helmets on for size.

Not in Pierrot's gardens did you toil,
scattering cinders on the Urals soil.

Under shelters, on long stretchers lying,
Russia's fair princesses lay a-dying.

Grieving for the nation, silently
stood the grim machine-gun crews nearby.

Army jackets, greatcoats you discarded,
donning carpet slippers worn and tattered.

Soon, with silks and satins we'll adorn you,
precious sable coats and wraps shall warm you.

Palaces we'll build you, fine and grand,
you fair ladies of this Russian land.

We shall write you many a composition
full of heartfelt love and admiration.

1946

Translated by Alex Miller

The Judge

Below a hill, among the furrows,
there fell a stern-faced Moscow lad,
his forage-cap reluctant leaving
the bullet-pierced and bleeding head.

Unconscious of the starless heavens,
sensing death's closeness in his mind,
he passed his hand over the furrows
with the sure deftness of the blind.

Departing for another country,
and not far distant from his home,
he clutched with slowly stiffening fingers
a handful of the soft, moist loam.

A handfull of recaptured Russia
as a memento he had seized,
and we, the living, were unable
to force apart the tight-clenched fist.

The hill was taken in the morning.
We buried him, just as he lay
in martial glory, with his comrades
in a big grave that very day.

And should there be a Day of Judgement
when people shall be called at last,
with all their sins, from all Earth's nations
by the thrice-sounded trumpet blast,

there'll sit behind that judgement table
no god with beard of floating mist,
only a young Red Army soldier,
alone before the astounded host,

holding in his right hand, once trampled
by Germans in that bloody hour,
the soil of his own native Russia,
not symbols of celestial power.

That boy shall see through all deception,
not the least fault shall he let go:
flattery from truth,
pain from pretence,
and wrath from spitefulness he'll know.

He shall see all with eye discerning,
his chest with one bright bloodstain marred—
that judge in faded army tunic,
presiding, saying not a word.

And it shall be the highest measure
that ever gauged the human soul—
gripped in that young man's ash-grey fingers,
a heavy handful of black soil.

1945

Translated by Alex Miller

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "N. Zabolotsky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the name.

(b. 1903, Kazan—d. 1958, Moscow)

Nikolai Zabolotsky, philosopher-poet, was one of the precursors of the poetry to come. He recast in higher philosophical form his experience of life, everything that he had suffered and thought.

His career began auspiciously enough (study at a teachers' training college, the publication of story books for children, his first collection of poems, *POSTS*, published in 1929, his *SECOND BOOK*, in 1937). But things took a sudden turn for the worse: as a result of a false denunciation, he was banned from 1938 to 1946. He worked as a builder and a craftsman in the Far East, in the Altai area and in Karaganda. He returned to Moscow in 1946.

Zabolotsky's work will probably be fully understood in all its profundity and complexity when nature enters more fully into the lives of people and they learn to cherish and protect her better than we do. Man, in Zabolotsky's interpretation, does not stand opposed to nature; he is the highest manifestation of its

colossal and hitherto far from fully apprehended forces. The poet is thrilled by the inexhaustibility of natural phenomena; while preserving an optimistic view of the world, he reflects on the complexity of the dialectically contradictory processes at work in the world and on the inner tragedy of moral conflict ("Village Spokesmen", 1954; "The Ugly Little Girl", 1955; "The Old Actress", 1956; "The Opposition of Mars", 1956, and others).

Zabolotsky was a brilliant translator. His works in this field include a monument of ancient Russian literature, *THE LAY OF IGOR'S HOST*, translated from old Russian into modern and a number of classic Georgian poems.

In This Grove of White Birches

In this grove of white birches
Where disaster and grief seem a dream,
Where the morning emerges
In a tremulous, roseate gleam,
Where the foliage surges
From the boughs in a turbulent stream,
Sing me, oriole, one of your loneliest dirges,
With my life for its theme.

Flying over the forest,
Watching people below in a glade,
You selected a modest
Wooden pipe for your first serenade.
Come, sweet singer, to see me,
In the freshness of dawn fly along.
Bless my wakening, comfort and free me
From dark dreams with your chaste morning song.

Yet I know, in the fight for existence,
Like all others, a soldier am I.
Even now, in the mind's farthest distance
Atoms toss men and houses sky-high.
While like imbecile windmills
Wars go whirling their death-wings around,
In the green forest stillness
Will my oriole's voice no more sound?

Shell-bursts marking your flight-line,
Over riverbeds darkened by reeds,
Over cliffs frowning darkly,
Over death-ridden ruins you speed.
Muted wanderer, know that I love you!
You are seeing me off to a war,
While a lethal cloud hovers above you;
What does fate hold in store?

Where great rivers flow twilit
When the sun calls the morning to birth,
Falling dead, with charred eyelids,

I will cling to the shuddering earth.
Giving vent to one last burst of thunder,
The machine-gun will halt with a throb,
Then your voice in my heart torn asunder
Will sing forth like a sob.

And above my white birches,
In my birchgrove of beauty supreme,
Where the foliage surges
In a turbulent, roseate stream,
Where on midnight-chilled petals
Rests a dew-drop divine,
Our victorious morning will kindle
For all time.

1946

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

I Do Not Look for Harmony in Nature

I do not look for harmony in Nature.
No meaningful proportions have I marked
Up to this day, alas, in any feature
Of earth or sky—in Nature's whole or part.

How grossly wayward is her savage world!
When raging winds begin to howl and groan,
The heart can hear no musical accord,
The soul can sense no measured, rhythmic tone.

But when the autumn sunset brings its light,
And when the wind falls silent in the distance,
When on the river's breast descends blind night,
The water glimmering, so languid and so listless,

When tired of everlasting, livelong motion,
Those useless labours which its whole existence fill,
Drowned in the troubled half-sleep of exhaustion,
The darkened river finally lies still,

When the enormous world of contradictions
Is fully sated with its futile game,
Before me from the water's depth arises
The image, as it were, of human pain.

And Nature at this hour lies sighing deeply,
Her sadness overflowing field and wood,
Dissatisfied with her unruly freedom,
Where evil is forever linked with good.

Then she will dream of swiftly whirling turbines,
Of fruitful work imbued with joy and sense,
Of breathing smokestacks, dams aglow on rivers,
Of cables with electric current tense.

So in the night, retiring to her rest,
A loving mother whom her love drives wild,
Yearns—all her son's bright world hid in her breast—
To see the sun together with her child.

1947

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

The Ugly Little Girl

The sparse, untidy, ginger-coloured curls
In meagre wisps about her head lie scattered;
The blouse she wears is faded, old and tattered.
She looks a freak among the boys and girls
Playing around her, poor, misshapen creature
With crooked teeth and sharp, ungainly features.
Not far away two handsome little lads
Enjoy the bicycles just bought them by their dads.
They ride about with happy turns and twists,
While she runs after, happy as the boys,
Though they are scarce aware that she exists.
Her heart is filled with other children's joys,
She laughs, their thoughtlessness forgiving,

An ugly little urchin with shrill voice,
In raptures at the sheer delight of living.

No shade of spite, not one malicious notion
Has ever found its way into her head.
All in the world arouses her emotion,
All is alive to her which some of us think dead.
And as I watch I try to quench the fear
That there must come a day, perhaps quite near,
When all her ugliness the child will come to know,
And life for her will be deprived of joy,
I dread to think the heart is just a toy
That can be broken by a single blow;
I still would hope that the unblemished beacon
Which shines within her with such brilliant light,
Will overcome the pain and burn as bright,
Will brave the worst of storms and never weaken.
Perhaps there is no beauty in her face
To captivate a man's imagination,
And yet she shows a spiritual grace
That fills each step of hers with animation.
If she be ugly, what is beauty then?
Why is it worshipped everywhere by men?
Is all its value in the outward form,
Or is it something hidden, live and warm?

1955

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent 'L' at the start and a large, sweeping flourish at the end that extends horizontally.

(b. 1905, Omsk—d. 1980, Moscow)

Born in the family of a railway worker, Leonid Martynov spent his childhood in a railway carriage travelling with his father along the Trans-Siberian railway. Such a start in life was a token of what followed: the poet was to spend many years roaming the earth. He went to different places and had different occupations, he accompanied geologists on expeditions, sold books in villages and travelled widely in Siberia and Turkestan, in the northerly regions of European Russia and in the Russian heartland. He was journalist, historian, ethnographer and cultural worker, he wrote poetry and historical narratives. It was only in the late forties, when he acquired his own totally individual style, that he became truly popular. His style is notable for its total lack of internal constraint: he moves freely from one theme to another and has no habitual, well-worn, oft-repeated themes. His manner is joy-

fully spontaneous. He could delve into philosophical deliberations about the structure of the Universe or enthuse over perfectly specific occurrences in life. He was proud and democratic in spirit, willing to assume responsibility for everything happening around him. He also loved to retire into his thoughts.

His verse is equally unconstrained. It can be allegorical, generalised, and also be perfectly conversational in tone. It can use the arid vocabulary and thought patterns of science and also be profoundly lyrical, an outpouring of the heart.

As a youth Martynov roamed the vast expanses of the Soviet Union driven by insatiable curiosity. With that same youthful curiosity the mature poet roamed the boundless expanses of the land of Poesy.

Traces

Tell me, when you visit homes
Luxurious or bare,
Entering through portals wide
Or up a narrow stair,
Listening to music
Conjured from the piano keys,
Answering your hosts' polite inquiries,
Tell me, please,
Do you leave a trace they wipe
From the parquet floor?
Do your hosts exchange a glance
As you close the door?
Or are they glad that you have been
And sad that you depart?
Do you leave a trace unseen
To cherish in the heart?

1945

Translated by Peter Tempest

The Water

The water
Kindly condescended
To flow!

It shone
So pure
So bright
It could not quench a thirst
Or cleanse you.
And this was not an oversight.

It lacked
The tears of weeping willows,

The juices
That in osiers rise.

It lacked
The river weed that billows,
The fish that snap at dragonflies.

It lacked
All turbulence,
Its meagre
Supply left longings unfulfilled.
It was devoid of life completely—
The water was, you see,
Distilled!

1946

Translated by Peter Tempest

Primogeniture

Poor people reckon
That we are wealthy:
Here every fairytale wish comes true,
You'll not be left in want of anything—
The keys of plenty have been handed to you.

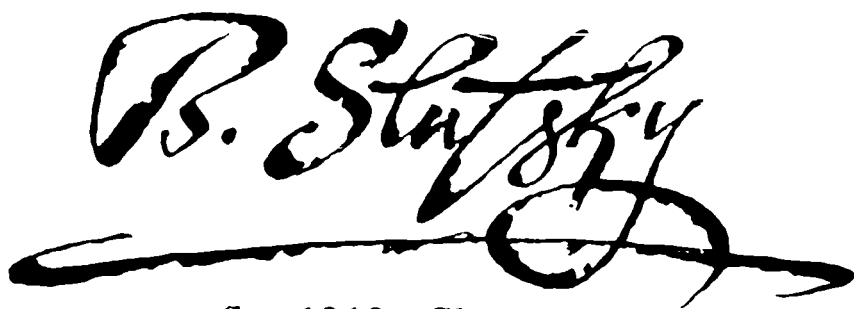
Rich people reckon
That we are paupers,
Even though pauperism is past history;
They've no idea how this life rewards us
Which we have built up through our victories.

But neither rich men nor beggars
Are we!
We're people the like of whom never existed.
So yesterday's labels, it's plain to see,
You'd better not pin to our clothes now, for
this is

Precisely my point:
We have features which
Render your labels absurd and premature.
We've nothing in common with poor or rich...
Here it's a case of primogeniture!

1956

Translated by Peter Tempest

A large, stylized, handwritten signature of Boris Slutsky in black ink. The signature is highly decorative, with long, sweeping strokes and a prominent flourish at the end.

(b. 1919, Slavyansk,
Donbas)

A poet born of the Great Patriotic War, Boris Slutsky volunteered for the front the moment war began and was three times wounded before it ended. He fought with the Soviet army all the way through Europe to Berlin. His poetry embraces tragic themes. In his book of poems entitled MEMORY he wrote: "In five neighbour countries our corpses lie buried..."

His judgements are outspoken and persuasive. The war has taught him to be inflexibly stern with the enemy. The war also taught him utter loyalty to friends and a readiness to defend to the last what one prizes most.

Boris Slutsky remains a front-line poet, even when writing about peacetime life. Beyond the trivia of daily life he sees the existence of man, beyond life's prose—the sublime poetry of the human spirit. His poetry is deceptively simple in structure but has an amazing range and depth of thought.

The Bath-house

You've never been inside one
In a small provincial town?
Of boars the tubs remind one,
Of rivers—the splashing sounds.

Men leave with the attendant
Their medals and wear just
Their scars—which I in general
Am more inclined to trust.

In pairs the one-armed soldiers
Help scrub each other's spine.
By war and toil men's bodies
Are marked with many a line.

These lines I read each Tuesday
And see their lives unfold—
True tales without embroidery,
Where not one lie is told.

There—on his chest a sailor
Back to our land-locked parts
Has brought from far-off places
A blue tattoo—two hearts.

There—with my spirit soaring—
“We'll never leave in need
Our mother” on the forearm
Of a partisan I read.

There—through the thin partition
Shrill women's voices come.
In steam heat we to blissful
Indulgences succumb.

There—soccer is debated.
Observe how proudly stand
The furnaceman, the tailor
With scorched or callused hand.

Long hardships were unable
To cow or overcome
The sturdy stock and nature
Of my great country's sons.

You mean to say you've never
Been in our local heaven,
Or tried the steam? You've not?
A mere two rubles¹ it costs.

1947

Translated by Peter Tempest

“The Battleship *Potemkin*”

The film was on.
The women ushers
Wept bitterly
The eighth time round.
Behind thick spectacles lids flickered
And slow tears trickled to the ground.

Grief shone and wrathful anger smouldered
In eyes the white screen held in thrall,
While boys tried to appear much older
To gain admittance to the hall.

So much was done, so much created
To blaring tunes that raised the roof
By black-and-white shots integrated
With goodness, hope and noble truth!

The characters were lauding freedom,
The plot spoke to the heart, aroused
Kind feelings in this grim, unfeeling,

¹ A small sum in 1947 before currency reform. The equivalent of 20 kopecks today.— *Tr.*

Harsh twentieth century
Of ours.

It urged the audience to pity
The fallen, and to censure wrong...
All this we had in mind when simply
Observing that "the film was on".

1961

Translated by Peter Tempest

My Comrades

Comrades of mine were burnt to ashes
In tanks—to cinders, to naught.
Half the world's green and luscious pastures
They have indeed brought forth.
Comrades of mine
 who passed through minefields
Were blown sky high—
 not a trace
Was left behind,
 but they
 ignited
Peace stars in far-off space.
Recalled with the dead on war anniversaries,
Glimpsed in a newsreel show,
My school-chum, fellow-student contemporaries
Became poems long ago.

1965

Translated by Peter Tempest

At a Children's Art Exhibition

The doors are flung open—that instant
You enter a town of skilled hands,
You enter a children's kingdom
Where frankness the eye commands.
It puts what it sees in the picture.
A painting that's no good is scrapped,
But one that gives pleasure is swiftly
To a children's exhibition dispatched.
Look, all it took Paris a century
To find out is here, as a rule,
Already well-known to these fair-haired
Young artists at nursery school.
For zoos they've a deep-seated passion,
And football they frankly adore.
In such scenes the colours are dashing,
The details they truthfully draw.
True too is this holiday—showing
The city, a sputnik on high,
And rockets—green, red and blue—throwing
Their sparkling bouquets in the sky.
And war fare is truly depicted:
Two bombs—and huge city wrecked.
Well, are not two bombs quite sufficient?
They're more than enough—I have checked...
With paintbrush in hand what more thrilling
Than miracle-working again!
I'll swap now my thirty years' living
For three brand-new lives, each of ten.

Translated by Peter Tempest

A. Surkov

(b. 1899, village of Serednevo,
near Yaroslavl)

Alexei Surkov is a poet of the older generation of Soviet writers, and if one were asked to single out a life story typical of that generation, then Surkov's would undoubtedly qualify. He was born in a village on the North Volga; he had a taste of the old regime and volunteered with enthusiasm for the Civil War front to fight for a new and better life. He returned to the countryside after demobilisation and worked on all the peace-time "fronts" where he could be of service to Soviet power: he even wrote plays for amateur dramatic companies. He was drawn to journalism, and proved himself a first-class newspaperman with a strong sense of social commitment. He then moved to Moscow where obtained a higher education. During the 30s, nine verse collections by him came out in succession; he became popular as a poet and song-writer.

All through the Great Patriotic War, Alexei Surkov wrote

poems that faithfully reflected the heroism of our people in the struggle with fascism. His "Song of the Brave" and "Restless Flames Twist and Toss in the Stove..." became famous all over the Soviet Union and were often thought to be anonymous folk-songs. Is there any form of recognition for a writer higher than that?

His sense of social commitment and his talent inevitably led to Surkov becoming one of the leaders of the Soviet Writers' Union. An indefatigable worker, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union in 1969.

To Sofia Crevs

Restless flames twist and toss in the stove.
Resin shines on the wood like a tear.
An accordion sings about love
And your eyes and your smile reappear.

Bushes whispered about you to me
In the snowfields near Moscow, near home.
Ah, my love, if it only could be,
If you heard me here singing alone!

You are far, far away at this hour—
Snows between us and winter's hard breath.
To rejoin you is not in my power,
Though just four steps divide me from death.

Sing, accordion, scorning the storm,
Call back joy, drive off sorrow and doubt.
In the cold of the dugout I'm warm,
For the fire of our love won't go out.

1941

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Pass Round the Hat

Of many a custom the Britons may boast,
Dating from times that are hoary,
But of all of their customs, there's one I like
most,
It's working man's pride and his glory:
If a fellow is suddenly taken ill,
If a family's turned out of their flat,
Fellow-workers in factory or mine, or mill,
Pass round the hat,
Pass round the hat.

In the daily grind, the labouring folk
Have learned to stand by each other;
When a fellow is down on his luck, or broke,
He knows he can count on his brother.
Or, say, there's a strike, and all the men
Are out, in the winter, at that—
The people will help to support them then:
 Pass round the hat,
 Pass round the hat.

In the dockland of London, in 'forty-nine,
I happened to be at a meeting,
A meeting for peace, a petition to sign,
And to send fellow-workers a greeting.
There were all sorts of men in that crowded hall,
Facing me there where I sat—
I saw a Welsh miner get up and call:
 Pass round the hat!
 Pass round the hat!

And a weaver from Lancashire old and bent,
Cried out, his fist in the air:
"A shilling for peace!"
 and round it went,
A hat, much the worse for wear.
The coins dropped in with steady increase,
Till the coffer was heavy and fat.
A shilling for peace! A shilling for peace!
 Pass round the hat!
 Pass round the hat!

"All that I have, I'll put in the pot,"
Said an out-o'-work, one of the many.
"I wish it was more, but it's all that I've got—
A penny, my very last penny!"
He dropped it in, and then without cease,
Came pennies from pockets as flat.
A penny for peace! A penny for peace!
 Pass round the hat!
 Pass round the hat!

In a shower of shillings and pennies bright,
We'll smother the warmongers' ravings.
Their death-dealing dollars are less than our mite,
The working-folks' hard-earned savings.
So send forth the hat on its errand of peace,
We workers are 'solid for that.
A shilling for peace! A penny for peace!
Pass round the hat!
Pass round the hat!

1950

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

M. Lukonin

(b. 1918, Astrakhan, d. 1976,
Moscow)

Mikhail Lukonin is a poet whose youth was seared by the stern war years. Suffice it to recall that on the eve of the war he worked at the tractor plant in Stalingrad, graduated from Stalingrad's teacher's training college and printed his first verse there—in that city by the Volga which came to symbolise the fiercest battles of the Second World War and to be forever associated with the Soviet people's great victory.

His first volume of verse HEARTBEAT (1947) included front-line poems, but in the following year he published his poem "Working Day" about soldiers returning from the front to peaceful labour.

Later came writings on a great variety of subjects, varied in tone, style and literary form. He wrote serious and highly original essays on poetry, as well as topical articles. He was highly respected as a person. In later life he headed the Moscow branch of the Union of Soviet Writers.

*To the book of poems he treasured most he gave the title **SURMOUNTING**. This could be said of all his poetry. From it there emerges a man of great courage and strong passions, a person with a rare power of surmounting difficulties.*

I Shall Come to You

You wonder:

Shall I bring home to you

This tired-out body of mine?

Shall we be able to live as two,

Together all the time?

I shall want to speak of death's leaden rain,

And how the grasses burned,

But you—

you, too, lived in woe and pain,

And you do not need such words.

I shall start, how by miracles I survived,

How scorching near me death came.

But you—

but you on one fatal night

Across the wide Volga swam.

I shall ask you to sing,

but you will find

That you have forgotten how.

And then

I shall go

clean out of my mind

With comforts not used to now:

The breakfast tablecloth you will spread,

But I shall squat by the door.

You will start, as usual,

to make the bed,

But I

shall sleep

on the floor.

I'll creep to the gate and dig a trench.

At night of you unaware,

I'll jump and shout,

my fists tight-clenched,

"Halt!—Who goes there?"

No,

do not think that so I shall come.

In this war's oppressive hell

We learned to conquer our woes as one,

To work and live twice as well.
Not so shall I come!
 Were that it's like,
It were better never to come.
I shall come—I shall work,
 I shall light my pipe,
Make a proper fug in the room.
Not for gratitude do I hasten so,
But with gratitude back do I hark.
All that I wished to, I told the foe—
Now I just want to work.
Not for consolation—
 but to console,
Shall I cross that threshold I know.
What I did as I hastened to you, was my goal,
Was my duty—
 no debt you owe.
I shall meet my friends, be invited as guest,
Live hard
 and eagerly too.
I shall work—in the smithy,
 and sleep—in bed.
And write poems of love for you.
In that fiery glow fanned up by the breeze
The choice for me was small.

But better to come
 with an empty sleeve,
Than with an empty soul.

1944

Translated by Walter May

Apropos of Women

That woman's a complex issue,
A pretty perplexing phenomenon
Is a truth that will sometimes miss you,
Although it's rather a common one.

Her power stays a secret unravelled,
Pooh-poohed at, to put it lightly.
Yet so far, wherever I've travelled,
Woman rules us, almighty.

This nonsense about our leadership,
Our pumped-up male domination
Being our birthright, allegedly,
Is sheerest imagination.

Coyly or enigmatically
She bestows her smiles upon us,
Us, treading our way erratically
To her with our sorrows and honours.

The plainest and most bewildering,
The cheerfulest and the weariest—
For her we are always children,
Regardless of age or experience.

Dead-earnestly or trivially
We go about life's occupations,
While woman looks on forgivingly,
The image of wisdom and patience.

Whether quarrelling, grumbling or fretting,
Whatever life she be leading us,
Remembering or forgetting,
Woman deserves our obedience.

Woman gives hope to the desperate,
Mocks at our doubts and uncertainty,
Pours the balm of her tenderness
On masculine scars, wounds, et cetera.

Then, after she's doctored and dressed us,
She uses heart-break to test us.

1961

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Sleep, Dear People...

Sleep, dear people,

Rest,

for you are weary.

Rest from love, the daily come-and-go,

Stardust in the Milky Way shows clearly.

Flowers fade

and pale your windows glow.

Your industrious hands have spent their forces,

And your eyes have flashed

And gazed their fill,

And your hearts, from joy and pain exhausted,

Quiver, braking,

now your limbs are still.

People, sleep!

This night's like any other.

Have no fear—

again shall come the day.

Sleep, dear people,

Through this night of wonder,

Rest

And tuck your apple-heels away.

With a joyful heart

I go tip-toeing.

I've seen

Paris deep in blossom sleep,

By her famous bay Marseilles reposing.

I remember Prague, too,

fast asleep.

I've known nighttime in Rangoon and Delhi

And Hanoi's light sleep beneath its palms.

And Phnom Penh, sun-weary, I've seen delving

Into dreams amid her country's charms.

Thailand

gently sleeps, there in the harbour

Floating markets doze. The night is clear.

"Hush!

Such moonlit beauty must be guarded!..."

I go whispering in every ear.

Helsinki's asleep.

Through snow that's falling,
Like a gentle deer I lightly spring...
All is quiet.
I proceed, recalling
There was little sleeping
in Peking.


Here near Moscow you, too, softly slumber.
Sleep, dear wife,
With cheek upon your palm.
Beauty,
Goodness
Rouse my heart to wonder.
Please forgive me for not being calm.
Now thick stars bestrew the Volga's waters,
In Glukhoi the farm folk go to bed.
I appear in dreams to my sweet daughter.
Hush!

Now may she rest her sleepy head.
Sleep, dear people, wrapped in predawn slumbers,
Rest, refresh yourselves
For work
And play,
Tying long-range rockets to your thumbs as
Children tie balloons lest they should stray.
May each child and wheat-ear reach maturity,
May they wake
 in daylight,
 not in gloom,—

Sleep, dear people,
Rest,
For you are weary.
In a peaceful world your tasks resume.

1962

Translated by Peter Tempest

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent 'V' at the start and a long, sweeping horizontal line at the bottom that ends in a small loop.

(b. 1918, Kemerovo)

Vassili Fyodorov is a poet whose life and person in a remarkable way combine the fundamental features of Soviet society. Born in a worker's family, he worked in the country and then in a factory. Equally well acquainted with the life of workers and farmers, he is no less familiar with intellectual circles: at the age of 32 he graduated from the Gorky Literary Institute. It is characteristic that his first poems were presented to public view in the pages of a factory newspaper when he was 26.

It is evidently his closeness to people working in all fields that has won him popularity and affection among a very wide reading public.

"The scientist dismembers matter, poets assemble Man," he affirms. This truth put so succinctly expresses the poet's own view of his mission. His concern is Man and it is for that reason he looks around him keenly, seeking to anticipate and

*discern all that is menacing or might
menace mankind.*

*His modesty combined with
his rare gifts has won Vassili
Fyodorov respect among his fellow-
poets, which is clear enough indica-
tion of the author's poetic and moral
worth.*

The State-Farm Hamlet

Blurred into one,
A hundred faces stare,
And a hundred sighs
Are mingled into one:
The cruel fate of Hamlet,
Prince of Denmark,
Is shown in the theatre
Of the farm...

Hamlet is suffering...
The gold of the crown,
For him emitting
Its paternal glow—
When its true master
Has become a ghost,
Shines just as grandly
On his killer's brow.

Hamlet is suffering...
Who would have reconciled,
Not tormented himself,
Half losing reason,
When out of dark embrace
That's marked with treason
His mother rises
With the former smile!

Hamlet is suffering...
Now, could he have sought
For oblivion
In love's idyllic hide,
When even sweet lips
Of the one beloved,
Ophelia,
Are poisoned with a lie!

Hamlet is suffering...
Billows speed along
To dash on Danish rocks
And break away.

And wierd light
Flickers throughout the hall,
As though flowing
From the ancient days.

Hamlet is suffering...
The beam is sending pollen
Paler than hair
Of lost Ophelia.
In it I see
A tragic woman visage,
Not very old
But already grey-haired.

Hamlet is suffering
The offspring of the kings...
A peasant-woman
In a wordless plaint.
What's she to Hamlet,
What is Hamlet to her
That she should rack herself
About his fate?

What's Hamlet to her,
When,
Confused in answers,
So many times
She pondered what to do.
Oh, how many
Sorrowful blunders
How many tragedies
Did she herself live through!

What's Hamlet to her
With the court intrigues?
When in that troubled year
Marked by fear,
Not calling for revenge
But for belief,
Her father's ghost
Did to her appear.

What's Hamlet to her
When she lived through perils,
Lived through the war
With all its deadly hell.
Already smitten,
With unearthly stare
Her husband saw
Her hair go grey.

What's Hamlet to her?
In the chill of soul
Not all will grasp
The tragedy of soil.
They made their own land
A hostile stranger,
A niggard,
Alien to human toil.

But from the height
Of all her past ordeals,
Of faith unquenchable—
She finds it in her heart
To be disturbed
About the Prince of Denmark,
Like mother 'bout her child
Is disturbed.

Blurred into hers,
A hundred faces stare,
A hundred sighs—
Mingled with her own,
The sufferings of Hamlet,
Prince of Denmark,
In a little state-farm theatre
Are shown.

1963

Translated by Galina Han

* * *

"Be venturesome!"
We poets are told.
"As sputniks do,
Explore the skies!
The physicist
Profoundly probes
The world...
You, too, anatomise!"

I'll grant we're kin,
But there's a chasm
That no bridge may span:
The scientist
Dismembers matter.
Poets
Assemble Man!

1964

Translated by Peter Tempest

* * *

A greybeard,
I thought,
Wouldn't love,
Pine
Or sigh
But gaze
Like a saint
At the girls
Passing by.

His blood,
Once unruly
As a river
In flood,
Would now flow
Quite smoothly,
Not churning
The mud.

No,
Old and young rivers
Seethe,
Speed in like fashion.
Sly grey beard,
You leave me
In the grip still
Of passion.

1965

Translated by Peter Tempest

Stone Inscription

My life's a burden.
In my presence
People grow eager
The truth to tell,
Feeling an urge
To start confessing,
Especially women
I could love well.

What a predicament!
God-like I live
Though not a god big enough
To forgive.

1961-1963

Translated by Peter Tempest



(b. 1933, Moscow)

Andrei Voznesensky was twenty-four when he graduated from the Moscow Architectural Institute. He had an excellent grasp of his subject, but he "fell ill" with poetry. At the same time he also entered with passionate enthusiasm into the magic world of painting and the twilight of Russian medieval history. As he puts it in his own autobiography:

"I don't regret the years spent on architecture. The manly muse of architecture is full of Ionic lyricism, is intolerant of spinelessness, amorphous graphomania and babble, its goals are honest, its proportions are human, it creates things both for daily life and Eternity.

"I cannot imagine serious contemporary thought and character without an elementary knowledge of mathematics or strength of materials. It is no accident that Khlebnikov flew in at our window from the world of mathematics."

The history of Voznesensky's poetry derives from the pre-history of his student years. It stems from all the cultural treasures accumulated by man in the past, the treasures of the humanities and the achievements of science. His poetry is acutely and penetratingly contemporary, both in its style and in its humanist aspirations. "All forms of progress are reactionary if man perishes," asserts the poet.

Anyone who follows the development of his poetry from 1958, when his first volume of verse came out, may form the impression that it is like the expanding Universe, encompassing more and more new spaces of existence. This is only true, since the poetry is unified by the integrity of the author's view of the world. A typical example of Andrei Voznesensky's work is "The Master Craftsmen", a small poem, but one charged with content and beautifully proportioned. It is based on the old legend about the blinding of the men who built the church of St. Basil the Blessed, the miracle of Russian architecture that adorns Red Square to this day. Legend though it be, the message of the poem is urgently contemporary, true art is immortal; the artist is always revolutionary; he stands opposed to ignorance and tyranny.

Parabolical Ballad

Fortunes like rockets fly routes parabolical,
Rainbows less widespread than gloom diabolical.

For instance, the fiery-red painter Gauguin,
Bohemian, though sales-agent until then:
To get to the Louvre from nearby Montmartre
He looped through Tahiti, just missing Sumatra.

Sped skyward, forgetting of money-born madness,
Of cackling wives and of stifling academies.

And so
he surmounted
terrestrial gravity.

The priests of the fine arts were eager to have at him:
 "A parabola's fine, but a straight line's far shorter.
 Better copy old Eden," they scoffed over porter.

But Gaugin zoomed away like today's rocketeers
In a wind that went tearing at coat-tails and ears
And entered the Louvre not through the front door,
But crashed his parabola through ceiling and floor!

Each reaches his truth with his own share of nerve:
A worm through a chink and a man by a curve.

There once lived a girl—just a few blocks away.
We took college together until one fine day.
Why on earth did I fly
like a blinking old ass
To mix with Tbilisi's ambiguous stars?

Don't blame me too hard for that barmy parabola,
Poor shoulders left out in the cold by a rambler!

How clear you rang out through the gloom of the
universe,
My slender antenna, in gales truly furious.
On and on I keep flying,
to land by your call,
My earthly antenna left out in the cold.
It's difficult business to fly a parabola.

Yet when art, love or history is the traveller,
Then, paragraphs, canons, prognoses defying,
Parabola trajectories they go flying...
Siberian spring drowns galoshes in water
.....
Perhaps, after all, though, a straight line
is shorter?

1959

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Autumn in Sigulda

Leaving, leaning out of a train
under the rain,

good-bye summer,
I've got to go...
Behind me they hammer
nails into shutters, blow after blow,
good-bye, I've got to go!

My woods are a vacant, joyless space—
no more leaves to doff—
like an accordion case
with the tunes carried off.

We people
are voided too,
we go when the time is due

from women, mothers, all in due course,
forced by eternal laws.

Good-bye, Mummy,
I won't be coming
so soon.
You'll stand there, transparent
as a cocoon,
worn out with the day.
Let's sit for a while till I start
away.

Good-bye, my country, as well,
I'll be star or maybe fir,
I won't cry for more—I've had my spell,
Thanks, life, that you were.

On targets for only ten points
I tried to score a hundred,
thanks for the way I blundered,
but thanks even more

that through my transparent shoulderblades
clairvoyance would shove
like a red male fist at first aid
through a rubber glove.

ANDREI VOZNESENSKY will come.
O to be not a word, not a bullying bum
but the least while more on your motherly cheek,
your own Andryushka, soft and meek.

Thanks for the woods full of colour
where we met and roamed over knolls and banks,
while you dragged your dog by the collar,
a stubborn old soul it was,
thanks,

I'm revived: so thanks for the autumn,
for explaining me to myself,
The landlady woke us at eight as she ought on
weekdays; on sundays it was like hell,

Her gramophone baring its fangs,
yet even for that
thanks.

But now you are leaving, moving away,
moving away like an out-going train,
leaving me vacant to fill with pain,
we're parting—going out of each other—
Parting again like me and mother.

You're beside me yet far away,
farther than words can say,
we'll all be repeated as years pass
in boyfriends and girlfriends and blades of grass,
this, that or the other is bound to replace us,
nature won't tolerate blank spaces,

thanks for the trees gone bare,
millions will fill up the gap, so why care.
Thanks for the laws whose weight I've felt,

yet—
a woman speeds over hill and plain
like a flaming leaf in the wake of a train...
Help!

1961

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Longjumeau

(Excerpts)

AVIA-INTRODUCTION

I start on my poem as though for an epoch unknown.
My neighbours doze off in their belts
to the engine's
smooth drone.

The Murom TV masts glow red
cigarettes in the night.
We've lots to discuss.
Have a smoke, Time, old man—
here's a light.

Let's cast up results.
Like meteors racing,
The years roll along, resplendent and blazing.

We know it's high time that a mass for our Springtime
were sung,
That we and our girlfriends
no longer are young,
That in seeing us off,
there are those who feign sadness—
Some wave Granny's shawl,
some their fists in their
gladness.

O Earth,
'tis of April your parting glance tells me
As, silent as night, on your back you repose.
A steam-engine
runs on its rails
in the distance,
Just like the zipper
that fastens
our clothes.

O Russia beloved,
all this is no trifle—
Each pain felt by you pierces me with pain, too.
O Russia,
I am
your capillary vessel,
Whatever hurts me, Russia,
also pains you.

How petty from here my achievements and failures,
My friends and adversaries, dark lobbies packing:

Forgive me,
 O Time,
 if at times
 words fail me.
You Time, are not money—
 yet you, too, are lacking.

Men pass
 and, in passing,
 carve out their names
On the paths they have trodden
 in letters of flame:
To the Future some leave—as it pleases the Fates—
A pair of torn trousers,
 others—whole states.

Now Him I distinguish,
 in my mind, seek to see
The man who spoke, lisping from a record to me.
Time, help me to paint those features pervading
My notes on his school in a suburb of Paris.

Forgive me, O Paris, your beauties unsung.
O Russia,
 forgive me your pathways untrodden.
Forgive me my daring in touching this subject,
Forgive me for fearing
 to touch it ere now.

I start on my poem. And if blunder I do,
Forgive me, O Time,
 just as I pardon you.

I pose o'er my notes in the light of my torch.
Like a tiny mosquito, our 'plane buzzes forth.
And floating beside it,
 in marble-white clouds
Lies our planet—
 like Lenin—
 profound, lofty-browed.

.....

Lenin an emigrant? NO, stop your lying!
(An emigrant's one who's cut off
from his land.)

All Russia,
streaming and burning and crying,
he bore within him, like talent grand.

The real examples of emigration
were boozing in Petersburg under protection,
they gallantly robbed the public exchequer,
swallowing oysters and delikatessen—
the emigrants!

They emigrated into their closets
with jewel-encrusted rosettes and bosses,
and screened themselves off behind their papers
from their country, cold autumnal and naked;
to courtesans, with painted faces
they emigrated.

In his landaulette, like an imp in a bottle,
quite isolated, mean-gutted and little,
among the mighty and ugly muzzles,
among the cassocks and market hucksters,
to the over and over rehearsed ovation
drove by the head of the emigration—
the Tsar!

In the Winter Palace the emigrants settled.
But the heart of Russia,
with love aglow,
beat in a distant town entitled—
Longjumeau.

.....

In that little kitchen are plain stools and
cupboards,
and like dragonflies' wings in shimmering hues,
the glimmering air the small side-street covers—
Rue Marie-Rose,

the morning has passed, now approaches
the evening,

and from other worlds which nobody knows
the Dominican monastery bell is pealing
above Marie-Rose.

I press my head to the frigid window,
to cool my burning brain,
and evening life I penetrate into
through Lenin's window-pane.

And seem to see him smiling,
mid these traders, baskets and cars,
or on phantom bicycle riding,
go slipping past,

or in that café with laughter
applauding the chansonnier,
or in rumbling Metro recalling
the dazzling whizz of the sleigh?

or maybe the skylarks and summer?
or in draughty lift starts to sway,
as beneath Eiffel tower, azure-rusty,
all Paris goes falling away,—

the roofs like grey pebbles glimmer
as if beneath water show,
and like shore-crabs with hungry nippers
gleam cathedral pincers below.

Above silvery panoramas
he bent like a watchmaker fine,
above sunset, advertisement banners,
he read the swift-changing signs,

he loved you, façades stiff-frozen,
like sad-looking shells on show,
but the Bastille was his chosen,
because they brought it low!

Through the banknote Bourse conflagration,
through encircling barricades,
broke through to him Revolution
with its blood-bespattered face.

And cutting his eyes, for some reason,
through the lilac majolica haze,
appears the south Moscow region,
with its bird-cotes, and secret May days,

and beyond them—the fronts, White
Guard action,
Russia roars for the star on its brow,
and my father, with student's devotion,
on the Kronstadt ice falls low.

That is why, my farewell Paris, no flamboyant
mansions I chose,—
I laud the launching-platform
of the side-street Marie-Rose!

Lenin's thoughts
from here
in parabolas,
like rockets streaming aglow,
overturned
the granite parapets
in the Winter Palace snow!

.....

Lenin's simple—
like matter,
and like matter—
a maze.

Our folk you can't flatter
with spoon-feeding ways!

No "cog-wheels"—no weaklings,
but real solid thinkers,
he loved all your meetings,
Glebs, Vanyas and Mitkas.

His philosophy, oratory,
like current through you surged;
himself,
like a battery,
by the masses was charged.

His well-matured thoughts,
in due time found a home
in "Philosophical Notes",
the 18th tome.

* * *

A sculptor once carved him.
Or rather,
he begged him if he would pose;
having sculptured Verlaine,
the carver
saw the likeness, shattering close,
and struck half-dumb as he saw it,
"Symbolic features!" he said,
"Revolutionaries and poets
have a similar shape of head!"

To carve a new world is poetic!
Because he was a poet inspired,
as once against Pushkin—
at Lenin
the poisoned bullet was fired!

.....
Having grown mature, leaving daily hustling habit,
we enter the Mausoleum,
like an X-ray cabinet,—
beyond legend and babble, bareheaded, without
affectation,
and Lenin gives us, like X-rays, his radiation.

We emerge from the dark, like the whirr of a film
projector:
"Say, Lenin, and are we like what you have
expected?
Say, Lenin, and where are our failures and
successes?
Say, Lenin, have we in the hustle missed the true
essence?"
It is often hard for us. But with fierce sunny light
the transparent brow like a beacon-lamp burns bright.

“Say, Lenin, and does your idea in us not die?”

And Lenin

makes reply.

To all our questions

Lenin gives a reply.

1962

Translated from the Russian

Ye. Yevtushenko

(b. 1933, Zima Station, near Irkutsk)

Yevgeny Yevtushenko combines qualities which might seem to belong to totally different people. He is famous for his militantly committed poetry. He is a fine actor—every poetry recital in which he takes part is an event and attracts audiences of thousands. He is a subtle lyrical poet. He is also one of the shrewdest of today's poetry critics, displaying notable powers of analytical thought.

And yet he is a highly integral, militant individuality. Yevtushenko can make mistakes, but he is incapable of dishonesty. His sincerity has been appreciated by the supreme judge of all poetry—the people, who have taken to their heart what is most important in his work. Many of his poems have been set to music, notably the world-famous "Do the Russians Want a War?"

There is hardly a single poetic style or genre that Yevtushenko has not tried with characteristic verve.

Being an extremely active person and poet, sometimes his technique is less than lapidary: subjects and images keep waylaying him and demanding immediate attention. Understandably, not everything he writes will survive the acid test of time; but very many of his poems, by virtue of their fiery sincerity, become major events of today.

Yevtushenko's work and his very personality have contributed to contemporary Soviet poetry that quality of questing, commitment and active involvement without which Soviet poetry cannot be conceived.

Do the Russians Want a War?

To Mark Bernes

Say, do the Russians want a war?—
Go ask our land, then ask once more
That silence lingering in the air
Above the birch and poplar there.
Beneath those trees lie soldier lads
Whose sons will answer for their dads.
To add to what you learned before,
Say—Do the Russians want a war?

Those soldiers died on every hand
Not only for their own dear land,
But so the world at night could sleep
And never have to wake and weep.
New York and Paris spend their nights
Asleep beneath the leaves and lights.
The answer's in their dreams, be sure.
Say—Do the Russians want a war?

Sure, we know how to fight a war,
But we don't want to see once more
The soldiers falling all around,
Their countryside a battleground.
Ask those who give the soldiers life,
Go ask my mother, ask my wife,
Then you will have to ask no more,
Say—Do the Russians want a war?

1961

Translated by Tom Botting

Perfection

A wooden porch smelling damply of pine,
a gust of wind, a leaf's palpitation...
Over the egg she has sculptured
a duck
stretches with a sense of emancipation.

Like a virgin maid who has heeded her maker,
with proper solemnity and proper awe
she has laid perfection—a dazzling white oval—
on a pedestal of matted straw.

Above moss-grown roofs and a muddy road
where patches of snow incongruous lie,
perfection—a great crimson globe—appears
and with laboured step climbs the ladder of sky.

Washed in twilight, as strangely ethereal
as a wreath of smoke at morning's birth,
a forest of spring looms ahead—perfection,
a breath expelled from the lungs of earth.

Perfection is not a new-fangled shape,
not a shape that is borrowed, as some insist.
Perfection is a breath of life,
a breath of the earth, that's what it is.

Do not eat up your heart because art is secondary,
because it's a mirror and its task is reflection,
because, compared to nature, it's fettered,
because it is only in search of perfection.

Do not put on a mask better worn by another,
in expressing yourself to yourself stay true.
Do not stray from nature but reproduce it,
reproduce the self that alone is you.

Reproduce as does nature's own creation
when, bending over a wintry well,
it drags up its image out of the depths
that, girded with ice, lie under a spell.

1963

Translated by Irina Zheleznova

* * *

Halves are no use to me! I scorn half measures!
Give me the whole sky! Lay the whole earth bare!

Mountains and rivers, seas and all their treasures
Are mine! And these with no one shall I share!

Life, do not fawn on me and grudge your favours.
Give me full weight! My shoulders they are strong.
I do not want a joy, a smile that wavers,
Nor do I want half griefs in a sad song.

There's but one half I welcome—half the pillow
Where, pressing tenderly against the cheek,
A golden ring is glowing on your finger
And shooting stars are falling, helpless, weak.

1966

Translated by Peter Tempest

* * *

Steadily fall the white snows
As if strung on a thread...
I'd live for ever, as life goes,
But, some day, I'll be dead.

Leaving no trace in the heights, souls
Upwards dissolving fly
Even as the white snows
From the earth to the sky.

Steadily fall the white snows...
I too will fly away
With no regrets or high hopes
Of an immortal day.

I am no believing man,
Am neither snow, nor star...
And I shall never be again
Never, ever more.

Yet, poor sinner, I worry
How I coped with the strife
And what, in the whirl and flurry,
I held dearer than life?

More than life I loved Russia
With backbone and with blood
I loved her ice-bound rivers,
And her rivers in flood.

The smell of her log cabins,
Of pines and needle-loam,
Her Pushkin, her Stenka Razin,
And her old folks at home.

When things were looking badly
I kept going, because
Though my life was messed up sadly
For my country—it was.

And in spite of misgivings
I still hope against hope
That I helped her a little
In so far as I'd scope.

She will forget me easily
The Russia I adore:
Only—let *her* abide and be
For ever, ever more.

Steadily fall the white snows
As in Pushkin's, Razin's time,
As they will fall when I go
And time out of mind.

The heavy snow effaces,
Its great flakes blinding bright,
My own and other's traces
From memory, from sight...

To be immortal's not for me
And yet hope still runs high—
If Russia should not cease to be
Then neither will I.

1965

Translated by Avril Pyman

The Mother

A mother with a child in her embrace
Is beautiful. But look! The lad is struggling
Already to escape this gentle cuddling
While tufts of flaxen down yet frame his face.
While he sups milk and patent, puréed pap
He's dreaming hopefully of vodka and of pickles;
Already firm and white, his first tooth prickles
Up through the gum, a sugar-mountain cap.
The mother reverences her tiny tot,
Half-choked with joy to see her lord and master
Ensconsed upon a throne of alabaster
Which they are just pretending is a pot.
But at what moment does the little boy,
His every freckle redolent of cunning,
Learn how to play on mother in his funning
While still pretending that he is her toy?
He knows just how to drive her round the bend
By writhing on the ground in perfect simulation
Of fits and spasms—sure dissimulation
Will help him get his own way in the end.
He knows just how to wheedle and persuade,
His guileless head upon her shoulder laying,
The alternative of tears to sweetness weighing
And all his calculations nicely made.
The mother has no doubts that all is sooth
For, though the sons of others may deceive them,
Yet this is her son: must she not believe him?
His every tear and temperament—the truth.
Then comes the day when her child in his turn
Lies too transparently—and her most sacred,
Implicit trust is shattered. Like raw acid
The boy's deceit his mother's blind heart burns.
A self-deceiver he who first deceives
In childhood. Though his victims past and future
May number many women—all his dupes now—
His mother was the first he caused to grieve...

1969

Translated by Avril Pyman

R. Rozhdestvensky

(b. 1932, village of Kosikha, Altai)

Robert Rozhdestvensky belongs to the generation of Soviet poets who were too young to take part in the Great Patriotic War, but nevertheless had more than their share of suffering during those times. When his parents left for the front, he was brought up in an orphanage. Fate sent him all over Russia. But his hard childhood only toughened his character. The war left a permanent mark on him. In his autobiography he wrote: "To this day, the fallen look at us from over there—from the war. They look at us from yellowed photographs. They look at us from the recesses of the memory, as if from the depths of the ocean. They look at us, and they are young, strong, all smiles. They look at us and are silent. As if waiting for an answer. There are many of them, those who never came back from the front. A great many. Twenty million. That is the incredible and appalling price that my people paid for victory."

Perhaps it is to his early years that he owes the at first seemingly contradictory qualities of his poetry. On the one hand, it is powerfully rhetorical and committed verse with a certain logic in the narration. On the other hand, it has a human charm that makes it musical, lyrical and very touching. A great many of Rozhdestvensky's poems have been set to music and are performed everywhere in the Soviet Union.

His first poems appeared in print when he was eighteen. For those who have been following the development of his art over the last two decades, it is clear that the declamatory, oratorical strain in his poetry and that of trustful lyricism are striving for synthesis, for harmonious interpenetration. This is what makes his mature verse unique.

Rozhdestvensky has already published over twenty collections of verse in Russian, and almost as many in languages of the Soviet Union and of foreign countries.

Thunder Shower

To Alyona

“Wait!...”

Then suddenly, not a sound,
and again:

“Wait!...”

An intractable murk

clings close to the darkling ground.

The rain on the swollen tree-buds

hits hard, like the truth, and

as straight.

On twisted branches birds shiver, sopping wet.

Cloudburst?

Who cares?

Sky crashing down in a frenzy?

Who cares!

Ominous, prolonged,

behind a black hill

the thunder snorts...

Wait!

Forget all hurts.

Forget all hurts...

Wait!

I have forgotten them all.

Until

the next ones...

Want me

to dry out the birds?

Whistle through the trees like a wind-storm, hot and

burning?

Bring you from over the seas a little blue flower?

Ask, and tomorrow

I'll dedicate

to you a mischievous dawning.

I'll write on the dawn:

“I dedicate this

to her..."

Crashing their way through the thickets

the rain-showers thrash in the night.

1961

Translated by Alex Miller

Requiem

(An excerpt)

*To the memory of the men of the Soviet Army
who fell in action during
the Second World War*

Remember!
Swift though the stream
of days and years
may flow—
remember!
To those who fell
a debt of love
we owe—
remember!

This debt lives on:
no tears
can e'er repay,
nor sorrow;
We must
keep faith with them
today,
tomorrow.
Our dreams,
our songs,
and all the joys
that life
was made for
At bitter cost
in battle's direst strife
were paid for.
Hear this my plea:
With all my strength
I urge—
remember!
With every breath,
with every heartbeat's surge—
remember!
E'en when our song
the starry skies has filled—
remember!
Hear yet the voice
of those
whose song is stilled—
remember!
Tell to our children
how our peace was won—
remember!
And may
their children
pass the message on:
remember!
Hail the new age
that's knocking
at our door,
O, Men of Earth!

Slay
 the foul beast
 of murd'rous war,
 O, Men of Worth!
And as we sail
 the conquered Space o'erhead—
 remember!
Pay homage still
 to our unconquered dead—
 remember!

1962

Translated by Archie Johnstone

A Man

“Beware of the Gods!”

He answered:

“Lies!”

They said:

“Now stay within limits...”

But he would simply laugh

And look at the skies

And firmly tread the earth.

And then he would dare

And crash through

limits!

Then they found new

limits...

“Now stay within limits...”

But he replied daringly!

“Now stay within limits...”

But he despised fears,

But he replied

laughing!

For him limits were all

narrow.

He is limitless
Even now,
 in his
 death.

Translated by Alexei Sosinsky

On Being Bought

"All Soviet writers are bought"...
(Western allegation)

Oh yes, I'm bought.
 I certainly *am* bought.
Asleep.
Awake.
In deed and dream and thought.
"The poet's finished,"
 Sovietologists assure.
Friends only smile:
 "He is not, of that you can be sure!"
Oh yes, I'm bought
 by blood-stained Kronstadt ice.
By a Lett commandant's accent,
by his eyes.
By commissars that fought the Civil War,
by leaden-cold Sivash
where tempests roar...
I've long been bought by snows of spotless white,
by the broad Irtysh,
by pre-war peace and quiet.
By all the soldiers
 killed in '41,
by their red blood
that dried beneath the sun...
I'm bought, besides,
 by all the chance-met campfires
that crackled deep in leafy forest empires.

¹ ChTZ—Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant.—*Tr.*

where fortune holds more happiness in store
where poetry and art
 are part of life,
where hearts burn on
despite distress and strife.
I'm bought—
 lock, stock and barrel,
 bought am I,
and so there's nothing
left of me to buy!

1970

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

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